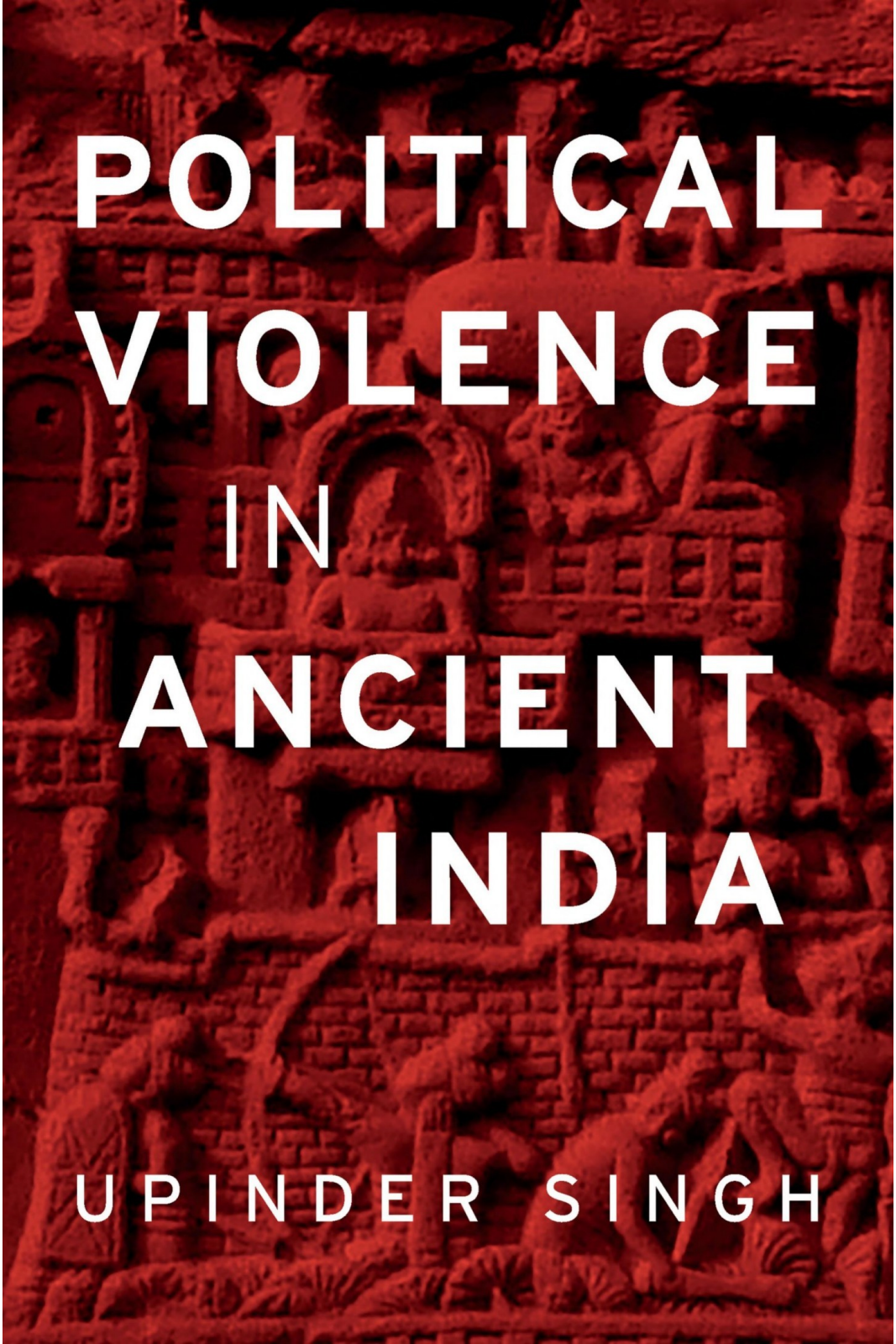
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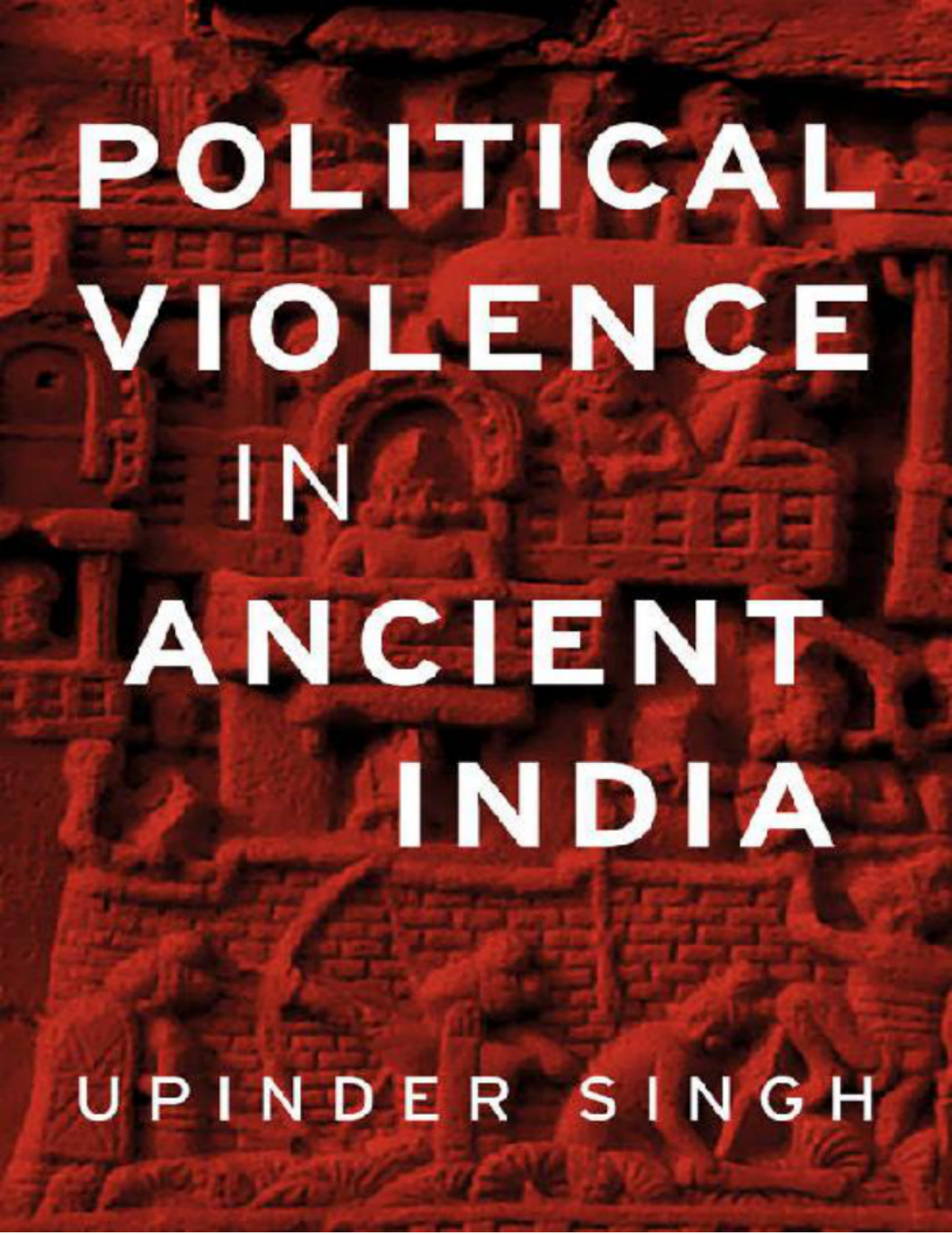
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POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Upinder Singh

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For my sisters Daman and Amrit

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Preface and Acknowledgments

My historical interests have been rather varied. After my initial research on the history of ancient and early medieval Orissa on the basis of epigraphic sources, I moved on to write about different themes including Ashoka, the epigraphic and archaeological profiles of Buddhist sites, aspects of ancient Indian social and economic history, the early history of Delhi and its suburbs, and the history of Indian archaeology. I expressed many of my ideas about India's early past in *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century* (2008), which was addressed to both university students and general readers. Shortly after that book was published, I was struck by a realization that during my decades of teaching, researching, and writing on various aspects of ancient Indian history, I had completely missed a fundamental element that was implied in its entire political narrative—violence.

This is when, one day, I absentmindedly reached out for a nondescript red-bound book that had lain, unnoticed and unread, on a dusty bookshelf for years—Kamandaka's *Nitisara.* I had even forgotten I possessed it. I turned its pages, first curious, soon riveted. I went on to publish my first paper on ideas of kingship, violence, and war, comparing Kamandaka's approach with that of Kautilya. From here, I turned to Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha,* a work I had long loved for its beautiful poetry, but now recognized as a rich repository of political ideas. I then returned to Ashoka's inscriptions, which I thought I knew well. This time they spoke to me in a very different way, and I saw in

them a connected political philosophy. As I delved into the *Nitisara, Raghuvamsha,* and Ashoka's inscriptions, I was especially interested in their ideas related to kingship, empire, war, and violence, and also in the manner in which these ideas intersected with their historical contexts.

This book represents an expansion of those initial inquiries, drawing on many more sources, situated within a continuous and comparative historical framework, in order to build larger arguments. While I had, over the years, acquired considerable experience dealing with epigraphic sources, writing this book gave me the opportunity to engage with texts such as the *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Jataka,* and *Panchatantra.* This made writing this book a wonderful voyage of discovery.

My interest in the problem of political violence and the interface between political ideas and practice was accompanied by another realization—of the need for histories of India that looked beyond India. Many of the texts discussed in this book traveled widely, and an exploration of their travels, transformation, and influence requires moving beyond the subcontinental frame, especially into Southeast Asia. Apart from drawing attention to the circulation of ideas in the ancient world, this wider frame also makes it possible to situate ancient Indian thought within a comparative context, enabling us to recognize cultural connections as well as cultural difference in the political ideas of the ancient world.

The history of ideas requires crossing not only spatial boundaries but also temporal ones. My book begins in the twentieth century and ends in the twenty-first because many of the texts discussed here have inspired varied reactions and interpretations over the centuries, and will probably do so for a long time to come. The fact that ancient ideas and symbols continue to be invoked in modern India makes a historical understanding of those ideas and symbols extremely relevant, indeed essential. Another reason for connecting the seemingly remote past with the more immediate present is the hope that a critical engagement with ancient Indian political thought can perhaps help us reflect on the problem of escalating political violence in our own time, whichever part of the world we may live in.

This book is the result of several years of thought and work. Among the many scholars whose works are cited in the endnotes and bibliography, I am especially indebted to those who have published the text and translations of the many works discussed in this book.

The names of the translators have been cited wherever I have used quotations from their works. Where no citations are attached to translated passages, the translations are my own.

Several people helped in different ways during the research and writing of this book. In Delhi, Dilip Simeon, P. K. Datta, Mahesh Rangarajan, Navnita Behera, and Naina Dayal shared ideas and reading material. In Leuven, Idesbald Goddeeris offered friendship, while Mark Depauw, Willy Clarysse, Stefan Schorn, and Alexander Meeus introduced me to writings on classical Greek and Hellenistic thought. Thomas Trautmann, Patrick Olivelle, Arlo Griffiths, Victor H. Mair, and Hans T. Bakker provided valuable long-distance suggestions and readings. Jan Wisseman Christie graciously gave me access to her *Register of the Inscriptions of Java.* Pankaj Tandon was kind enough to provide many useful articles and images of ancient Indian coins. Rukun Advani offered sound and sensible advice at several critical junctures.

My friends Seema Alavi, Parul Pandya Dhar, and Nayanjot Lahiri have been constant companions and sources of encouragement during the highs and lows of writing this book. My younger son, Raghav, too, has been a sensitive supporter throughout the process. As with my other books, my husband, Vijay Tankha, has been friend, critic, sounding board, and editor, and I owe him special thanks.

I also owe thanks to the reviewers of this book, whose excellent suggestions helped greatly in the final revision of the text. Finally, I would like to thank Sharmila Sen, Heather Hughes, and the entire Harvard University Press team for their support, efficiency, and meticulous hard work, which have resulted in this publication.

Note on Transliteration

In order to make this book accessible to a wider audience, and to strike a balance between specialist and nonspecialist readers, transliteration conventions and diacritics have not been used in all cases.

Names of people, places, and texts have been spelled phonetically, without diacritics, except where they are a part of quotations or titles of articles or books.

Diacritics have not been used for Tamil words.

Important non-English special or technical terms in Sanskrit or Prakrit are usually given with diacritics and in italics. The exceptions are words that occur very frequently in the text, such as dharma, dhamma, sangha, Brahmana, Kshatriya, and so on. These have been spelled phonetically and are given without diacritics or italicization.

Chronology of Dynasties

THE CHRONOLOGY OF ancient Indian dynastic history is highly debated. Absolute dates are few. The approximate dates of the major dynasties and some of the rulers discussed in this book are given below.

Early dynasties of Magadha: c. sixth–fourth centuries BCE
- Haryankas (including Bimbisara, Ajatashatru)
- Shaishunagas
- Nandas

Alexander's invasion: 327 / 326 BCE

Mauryas: c. 324 / 321–187 BCE
- Chandragupta (c. 324 / 321–297 BCE)
- Bindusara (c. 297–273 BCE)
- Ashoka (c. 268–232 BCE)

Shungas: second–first centuries BCE
- Pushyamitra Shunga: second / first century BCE

Chedis / Mahameghavahanas
- Kharavela: first century BCE / first century CE

Indo-Greeks / Indo-Bactrians: second–first century BCE

Shaka Kshatrapas (Kshaharata and Kardamaka branches):

first–second century CE
- Rudradaman (second century CE)

Kushanas: first–early fourth century CE

Satavahanas: first–third century CE

Ikshvakus (of Vijayapuri): third–early fourth century CE

Guptas: c. 300–600 CE
- Chandragupta I (c. 319–335 / 350 CE)
- Samudragupta (c. 335 / 350–370 CE)
- Chandragupta II (c. 376–413 / 415 CE)

Vakatakas (Nandivardhana and Vatsagulma branches): third–early sixth century CE
- Pravarasena II (c. 400–450 CE)
- Prabhavatigupta as acting ruler (c. 405–419 CE)

Huna invasions and rule: fifth–sixth century CE
- Toramana
- Mihirakula

Chronology of Texts

THE DATES OF most of the major texts discussed in this book are highly debated. Given below, for ready reference, is the conservative time range within which their composition is usually placed:

Buddhist *Tipitaka:* c. 500–300 BCE

Mahabharata: c. 400 BCE–400 CE

Ramayana: c. 400 BCE–400 CE

Arthashastra: c. 300 BCE–200 CE

Manusmriti: c. 200 BCE–200 CE

Bhagavadgita: c. 200 BCE–200 CE

Bhasa's plays: second century CE

Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita:* first / second century CE

Ashokavadana: second century CE

Jataka: third century BCE–third century CE

Kamandaka's *Nitisara:* c. 400–700 CE

Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala* and *Raghuvamsha:* fourth / fifth century CE

Vishakhadatta's *Mudrarakshasa:* fourth / fifth century CE

Panchatantra: third–fourth century CE

Brihatsamhita: sixth century CE

Introduction

On a warm day in late July 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru introduced the new national flag to the Constituent Assembly of India. It was a tricolor with three bands—saffron on top, dark green at the bottom, and white in the middle, with a navy-blue twenty-four-spoked wheel (*cakra*) in the center. In the emotionally charged debate that followed, various members of the assembly rose to speak, explaining how they understood its symbolism and asserting the allegiance of the social or religious group they represented to the new flag.[1] The wheel in the center could represent the Gandhian spinning wheel, the sun's rays, the wheel of time, even eternity. But Nehru was unequivocal that it represented the wheel on the abacus of the Sarnath lion capital of the great Maurya emperor Ashoka and the teaching of the Buddha. The ideas associated with these two great men of ancient India had traveled to distant parts of the world. Hence, for the prime minister designate, the wheel symbolized the aspirations of the new republic to attain a place of prestige among the community of modern nations.

A more direct, unambiguous and complete incorporation of an Ashokan symbol occurred a few months later, when the capital of the Sarnath pillar was adopted as the national emblem.[2] This beautiful sandstone capital (see Figure 1), with an intense polish that endows it with a dark metallic sheen, once crowned a pillar inscribed with the emperor's message to the Buddhist monastic order. Artistically the most splendid and iconologically the most elaborate of the Ashokan capitals, it consists of four lions sitting back to back on a circular abacus, which has an elephant, horse, humped bull, and lion carved in high relief. The abacus rests on an inverted lotus. The majestic, still repose of the four crowning lions contrasts with the animals moving clockwise on the abacus, separated from one another by wheels. The discovery of fragments of a wheel nearby suggests that the Sarnath

lions may have once supported a wheel.

1 The Sarnath capital

Photograph: Aditya Arya

Translating the three-dimensional stone capital into an image suitable for reproduction on a flat surface required selection and editing. In the national emblem, only three of the four crowning lions are visible; the fourth must be imagined. And only two animals—the bull and horse—can be seen on the abacus, separated by a wheel, with

traces of wheels visible on the two sides. Since the abacus lion is badly damaged, this was the most aesthetically pleasing view. But there was a very significant addition. In the national emblem, below the abacus, written in the Devanagari script, is the legend *Satyameva jayate* (Truth alone is victorious).[3] These words from the *Mundaka Upanishad* united the complex symbolism of the Ashokan capital with an even more ancient philosophical tradition. The motto selected for the Lok Sabha, the lower house of elected representatives of the Indian parliament, was *Dharmacakra-pravartanaya* (for turning the wheel of dharma). As the Buddha had done in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, so it was hoped, would modern parliamentarians promote the cause of righteousness.

These combinations of images and words created a highly charged political iconography that connected the new Indian nation with its ancient past. Dharma, a powerful idea with a complex history, variety of meaning, and a subject of prolonged and intense disquisition in Indian political thought for centuries, stood at the center. Although complex and open to multiple interpretations, the central motifs of the national flag and national emblem privileged Buddhism and the Buddhist emperor Ashoka, both associated in the popular imagination with nonviolence. It was no coincidence, and in fact fitting, that a country that had achieved nationhood predominantly through nonviolence, adopted emblems that had strong associations with this very principle.

Modern India's Search for Her Ancient Roots

For several decades prior to Indian independence, Indian intellectuals and political leaders had turned towards ancient India, trying to understand her, seeking inspiration and solutions for their contemporary concerns.[4] The search for ancient civilizational and intellectual roots resulted in the creation of not one but several historical narratives. The sources of inspiration and the interpretations varied radically, although they also intersected at certain points. The issues of violence and nonviolence featured prominently in all of them.

Nehru probably knew more about Indian history than any other political leader of his time. *The Discovery of India* is a history of India from ancient times till the 1940s, into which the author wove his personal history and the nationalist aspirations of his age.[5] Nehru saw in Indian culture a strong impetus toward synthesis, absorption, and rejuvenation. Despite the existence of caste and social inequality, he thought that India's history was marked by a high level of social harmony and a lack of conflict. The remarkable continuity and stability of this culture were the result of the ideas of detachment and penance, an extreme tolerance of others' beliefs, and the centrality of dharma, with its focus on duty. With his occidental education and temperament, Nehru was greatly influenced by the western idealization of Buddhism. He was also fascinated by the Mauryas and their great empire. Above all, he was attracted by Ashoka's cosmopolitanism, renunciation of war, and assiduous pursuit of his people's good.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's understanding of Indian history was an integral part of his political thought and practice. Gandhi engaged in an original and creative manner with a variety of religious traditions and with the concepts of dharma, sacrifice (*yajña*), nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*), and renunciation, which had been intensely discussed and debated by Indians over centuries. Interpreting the old concepts in new ways and adding to them the ideas of love of humanity and service, he created a powerful new intellectual and philosophical synthesis that formed the foundation of his anticolonial and nation-building agenda.[6] For Gandhi, modern capitalist, industrial civilization was based on greed, selfishness, exploitation and a great

deal of violence—against the self, the other, and nature. Although aware of the elements of violence in Indian thought and history, he saw India as a nation that offered the world a unique understanding of life and the world, one in which the principle of nonviolence stood out. The *Bhagavadgita* was a text that inspired many nationalists and revolutionaries who argued for an aggressive, even violent, response to colonial rule. But Gandhi read it as a manifesto of nonviolence.[7] According to him, the *Bhagavadgita* rejects all acts that cannot be performed without attachment, and by implication, this extended to killing, lying, and dissolute behavior. Hence, if one lived one's life according to this text—which Gandhi claimed he himself did—one was bound to practice truth and nonviolence. By using nonviolence as a philosophy and strategy to overthrow the British empire, and by linking it to the ancient Indian intellectual and philosophic tradition, Gandhi created the impression that nonviolence was rooted in a unique way in the Indian psyche.

Bhimrao Ambedkar is another important political figure whose political agenda was strongly embedded in an interpretation of ancient Indian history. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* published posthumously in 1957, gives his reading of Buddhism and ends with prayers for the return of the Buddha to his native land and for the spread of his teaching. Ambedkar saw the Buddha as a rationalist and social revolutionary and Buddhism as a panacea for the problems of India's oppressed scheduled castes. Elsewhere, he presented the "Untouchables" of the twentieth century as descendants of Buddhists of ancient times, who had remained steadfast in their loyalty to their religion and who had been reduced to a deplorable social position due to the machinations of the Brahmana class. Buddhism and Marxism both gave a powerful call for social equality, but Ambedkar argued that Buddhism was superior because it advocated peaceful, democratic means to achieve this end. Ambedkar was against violence, but conceded that absolute nonviolence was impossible. Even the Buddha would have justified violence, were it required for the attainment of just and justifiable ends.[8]

There were many other political understandings of ancient India. In Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's reading of Indian history, violence and war were necessary and laudable Hindu responses to foreign aggressors. Hindu warfare was based on lofty principles of righteous war (*dharma-yuddha*). In Savarkar's *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History,* nonviolence is an effete and negative value; its practitioners

have no place in the list of glorious epochs.[9] The stars of this history are aggressive men who freed their people from the shackles of foreign domination. In Maurya history, king Chandragupta and his Brahmana minister Chanakya are lauded for their aggressive empire-building, which led to the first glorious epoch in Indian history. Ashoka, on the other hand, is described in negative terms. According to Savarkar, his over-zealous propaganda of Buddhist principles such as nonviolence caused enormous harm to the Indian political outlook.

Although there were many different ideas of ancient India, it was the idealized Nehruvian model of the ancient Indian past—one in which Buddhism, Ashoka, nonviolence, and cosmopolitanism had pride of place—that were reflected in the national flag and more so, in the national emblem. This model affirmed the nonviolent ideology of Gandhian nationalism and projected a set of aspirations for India's future. But it was based on a very selective reading of India's ancient history. As will be argued in this book, there is no doubt that the history of ancient India, as that of other parts of the world, was marked by considerable violence of various kinds. The extent of this violence has usually been either underestimated or ignored. And yet, violence and nonviolence were subjects of lively debate in ancient Indian thought over the centuries, and this debate was marked by an intensity and diversity that was unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient world. This book is an exploration of the questions about and debate over one kind of violence—political violence.

Words and Meanings

Can a distinct political domain be identified in ancient Indian thought? The answer to this question, and one that allows us to proceed further with this inquiry rather than end it when we have scarcely begun, is that ancient Indian thought does, in fact, identify and discuss a number of distinct issues related to power, kingship, governance, and the state, which can be identified as "political," even though it often casts the political on a social, metaphysical, and moral canvas. The political domain was recognized as the subject of specialized study, referred to variously as *daṇḍanīti, arthaśāstra,* and *nītiśāstra*.

The English "violence" is generally used to refer to actions involving physical force that is intended to injure, harm, or kill. Definitions of "nonviolence," on the other hand, have been strongly influenced by Gandhian nonviolence as a strategy of resistance against British colonial rule. This is clear from the two elements that form part of dictionary definitions of the term: One is the use of peaceful means, and the second refers to the goals to which these peaceful means are directed—namely, to bring about purposeful political or social change. Several aspects of such definitions can be questioned. For instance, the exclusive association of violence with physical force is limiting, as it rules out other possible forms of violence, such as that manifested in word or thought. Second, while intention and goals are often central to the discourse on nonviolence, we can also conceive of situations where the expressions or practice of violence or nonviolence are ends in themselves.

If violence is to be understood as the use of force or the infliction of injury that is considered in some way unjustified, excessive, illegitimate, or morally wrong, it cannot carry universal or unchanging connotation. In our own times, there are intense and often acrimonious debates on war, torture, terrorism, animal rights, vegetarianism, abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. The violence involved in these acts is often framed within a discourse of rights—the rights of civil society, noncombatants, the individual, animals, the fetus, and others. When modern western conceptualizations of the problem of violence are compared with ancient Indian ones (such terms are problematic because the conceal much heterogeneity), the

latter seem to be framed within a very different and culture-specific set of epistemological and metaphysical ideas related to the nature of the cosmos and the beings that inhabit it; the goals of human existence; the concepts of merit and sin; and the relationship between the self, the other, and the larger social order. At the same time, there are also some meeting points, for instance, in the distinction between ends and means, and the interconnection of violence, law, justice, and order. But rather than essentializing, simplifying, and comparing "Indian" and "western" perspectives, this book argues that the long and intense intellectual engagement with the problem of political violence in ancient India demands attention and needs to be understood in all its diversity and nuances on its own terms, as it unfolded in its changing historical contexts.

Ancient Indian lexicons contain several words for force, violence, and injury. The most important one is the Sanskrit *hiṁsā,* which shares with the English word "violence" the idea that the force inflicted or the injury caused is excessive, unjustified, or unethical. It is interesting that the antonyms—the Sanskrit *ahiṁsā* and the English "nonviolence"—both create a positive value through the negation of something negative (*hiṁsā,* violence).[10] *Ahiṁsā* is sometimes understood as a desiderative indicating a non-desire to harm or to kill. However, it should more accurately be understood as referring to the absence of the causing of injury (including killing), usually to another, either human or animal, corresponding in a broad sense to the connotations of the English "nonviolence."[11] But this is the "classical" meaning that *ahiṁsā eventually* came to acquire. The word has a history. In Vedic ritual texts, it occurs only in the dative form and means "for the safety or security of."[12] Apart from *ahiṁsā,* another important compound with a negative prefix is *ānṛśaṁsya,* which is especially conspicuous in the *Mahabharata.* While it overlaps in meaning with *ahiṁsā, ānṛśaṁsya* has more abstract connotations of an *attitude* of non-cruelty and compassion (although acts, intentions, and attitudes are, of course, connected). There are two interpretations of the relationship between *ahiṁsā* and *ānṛśaṁsya.* One is that *ānṛśaṁsya* is a further, amplified form of the idea of *ahiṁsā.* The other is that it is something less than *ahiṁsā,* reflecting a realization of the impossibility of absolute nonviolence, and the positing of the more practical goal of practicing compassion.[13] Both points of view have merit, and *ānṛśaṁsya* can perhaps paradoxically be seen as both something more and something less than *ahiṁsā.*

A problem in dealing with the issue of violence is that ancient Indian texts abound in apparently paradoxical and contradictory statements. For instance, what does the *Manavadharmashastra* (also known as the *Manusmriti*) mean when, in the context of animal sacrifice, it asserts that *hiṁsā* that is sanctioned by the Veda and is well-established in mobile and immobile creation should definitely be understood as *ahiṁsā?*[14] The text is clearly distinguishing between what *appears* to be violence and what is *true* violence. The implication of such a statement (similar ones are made in many other texts as well) is that means have to be considered in relation to ends. In contexts where injuring or killing another can be established as necessary, meaningful, or even beneficial, it should not be considered violence at all. So words and ideas related to violence and nonviolence can be understood only through a contextual analysis, an exploration carried out through the following chapters of this book.

Argument and Its Limits

Disciplinary boundaries existed in ancient India, but knowledge and ideas flowed across them. For instance, the texts on dharma and polity share the ideas of the goals of human life (three or four in number, known respectively as *trivarga* or *caturvarga*) and duty based on social class and life stage (*varṇāśrama dharma*), the theory of rebirth, and the consequences of action (karma).[15] The boundaries between philosophy, metaphysics, and political thought were permeable, and there seems to have been dialogue between political and medical treatises. Literature displays great receptivity to ideas from all disciplines and drew freely from them.

Amartya Sen has written about the loquaciousness and argumentativeness of Indian culture.[16] Dialogue and debate are certainly important parts of the Indian intellectual tradition. Of course, the arguments that are recorded in the texts are largely those of upper-class males; the voices of others have to be teased out with great difficulty. Many ancient Indian texts are polysemic; multiple ideas, sometimes contradictory ones, jostle with each other within a single text. This is partly because of their complex compositional and transmission history, but it also tells us something about the nature of the ancient Indian intellectual tradition. Vitriolic debate and diatribe are present in systems of thought that view themselves in oppositional terms; but *within* traditions, what is visible is a tendency to juxtapose different views, rather than to reject and replace them. For instance, the Dharmashastra texts, which elaborate on the culturally important concept of dharma, had a certain in-built flexibility of perspective that belied the rhetorical assertion of the universality and timelessness of dharma. The fact is that in many texts, the frequent appeal to tradition and consensus is a veneer that conceals very divergent views.

But there were limits to flexibility and argument. In a famous philosophical debate in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,* in which many matters related to the self, universe, gods, and spirits were raised, when a woman named Gargi pressed on relentlessly with her questions, the sage Yajnavalkya eventually told her to desist from asking any more, lest her head fall off. The Buddha, too, sometimes imperiously admonished persistent interlocutors and abruptly ended discussions on tricky doctrinal issues, leaving them unresolved. When

the intensity of argument and dissent could not be contained within the boundaries of a particular tradition, new traditions were born. Buddhism, which very self-consciously positioned itself as a counter to Brahmanism, is an example of this.

The issues of violence and nonviolence in general as well as in the political sphere in various textual and religious traditions have been touched on in several scholarly writings.[17] But many questions remain. What are the various Indian approaches to political violence? How is the violence of the state and against the state understood? Is there a purely political response to the problem of violence, or are the perspectives always tied up with metaphysics or religion? How do different traditions and textual genres talk and respond to each other? Are we looking at radical differences in attitude, or is there an element of cultural consensus? Is there a relationship between the historical incidence of violence and the intensity of discussion of the issue? What was the impact of religious doctrines that emphasize nonviolence and compassion on the practice of political violence? To what extent can we distinguish between elite and popular responses to the issue? Comparison is useful, and the ways in which the ancient Indian intellectual tradition dealt with the problem of political violence can be fruitfully compared with other ancient cultures such as those of Persia, China, and Greece.

Kingship and Political Violence

Violence lies at the heart of the state. Dominant control over the mechanisms of force was an important aspect of the transition from pre-state to state societies. The control, threat, and perpetuation of violence were essential to the origin and the sustenance of state structures. In the context of the modern nation-state, powerful voices have described the changing technologies of state violence and how the acceptance and justification of this violence have rendered it almost invisible. The relationship between politics, sovereignty, and the power to dictate who may live and who should die has also been persuasively delineated.[18] The escalation of the actual and potential violence of the modern state toward its own citizens, other states, and the environment; the threat posed by transnational terrorist networks; voices that justify, invisibilize, or question these various kinds of violence; and the search for new kinds of political, social, and environmental security and ethics all make an exploration of political violence in its general and specific aspects a matter of enormous contemporary relevance. The search for new ways of understanding these issues involves rejecting the privileging of the modern and the western in histories of ideas and institutions, and an attentiveness towards their premodern, non-western trajectories.

Political violence in ancient India can be approached from two perspectives—one is to investigate the actual incidence of such violence in its various forms; the other is to examine how the problem posed by this violence was dealt with at the intellectual level. The two issues are, of course, closely related. The fact that various kinds of violence are woven into the fabric of ancient Indian history is evident from incessant inter-dynastic and intra-dynastic power struggles, warfare between states, and violent encounters between the state and forest people. It is evident in the celebration of the royal hunt, where the killing of animals of the wild became symbolic of the king's political prowess and mastery over nature. It is also evident in the detailed discussions of punishment, especially for political crimes such as treason. The quantum of different kinds of political violence in ancient India cannot be charted in the form of a graph, because statistics simply do not exist. What is of much greater interest and importance is how the problem of violence was discussed and

debated, and the relative value attached to its opposite—nonviolence—in the political sphere. As this is a historical investigation, it is grounded in political history and in a discussion of political processes, including the theory and practice of kingship, which was the central political institution of ancient India. This institution had a dominant role in controlling, perpetrating, defining, justifying, and even attracting political violence.

This investigation of ancient Indian kingship is quite different from what can loosely be described as the traditional Indological / philological approach.[19] While offering perceptive insights and drawing attention to Indo-European parallels, that approach has tended to focus on early Brahmanical texts, the religious aspects of kingship, and the meanings embedded in royal ritual. It has tended to essentialize and homogenize kingship, dharma, and religion, and has rarely taken into account the full variety of perspectives, political realities, and historical contexts. Such problems are also visible in the writings of social anthropologists. Louis Dumont speaks of ancient Indian kingship as becoming increasingly "secularized," with the political sphere of force eventually emerging as separate and distinct from the sphere of values. The king reigned over the sphere of *artha* (here, secular power) while the Brahmana priest / *purohita* (royal chaplain) reigned supreme over the higher sphere of dharma.[20] The king–Brahmana relationship has also been described by J. C. Heesterman as an irresoluble problem: The king desperately needed the Brahmana to legitimize his power, but the Brahmana was supposed to avoid associating with the king. The situation was made more complex by the existence of an independent, renunciatory sphere that lay outside the social one. The Brahmana's authority stemmed not from his being a "priest" but from his representing the values of the renouncer.[21] As for kingship, it remained "suspended between sacrality and secularity, divinity and mortal humanity, legitimate authority and arbitrary power, dharma and *adharma*."[22]

But the Brahmana dharma experts' view of kingship cannot be described as the "Indian view." And is there even a single Brahmanical view? As we shall see, Brahmana political theorists such as Kautilya paid lip service to dharma but were not really bothered by supposedly "irresoluble" problems. The "dharma view" of politics was countered by an "*artha* view," and there were several positions in between these two extremes. Further, expressions of the ideology of kingship in texts or inscriptions should not be mistaken for the historical realities of the

institution. This is the error made, for instance, in the theory of "ritual kingship," which is part of the idea of the segmentary state model, which has been applied to the Pallava and Chola states of later times.[23] The institution of kingship can be understood only by situating it historically at the intersection of ideology and practice.

In histories of ancient India, the fantasy of a powerful, highly centralized Maurya empire (c. 324–187 BCE) was replaced many decades ago by the idea that the empire had little effectual control beyond its metropolitan and core areas. In the case of the Gupta empire (c. 300–600 CE), the theory of Indian feudalism (since then, much critiqued) described this period in terms of political, economic, and social fragmentation.[24] The reaction against state-centric histories emphasized that the rhythms of social, economic, religious, and cultural change did not correspond to the chronologies of dynastic history. In the larger historiographical shift of focus from political narrative to political process, political ideas generally took a back seat and were usually mentioned in passing as a legitimation strategy. Political violence was scarcely noticed, let alone analyzed.

Anthropological models are useful while tracing the transition from tribes and chiefdoms to kingdoms and empires. But historians have often been all too preoccupied with searching for centrally recruited standing armies and bureaucratized land revenue systems, evidence of which is rarely clear or forthcoming in the available sources. Finding new ways of thinking about ancient states and empires means moving beyond the extremes of "statist" and "non-statist" histories. It means recognizing the existence of "autonomous spaces" within state structures.[25] It means moving toward a more flexible understanding of ancient political systems, one that takes their conceptual universe much more seriously. In recent years, political ideas, repackaged as the "political imagination," are once again in the limelight.[26] Ancient polities were active, dynamic creatures with distinct ideas about themselves. What they did and said and the material traces they left behind are all germane to how we understand them.

Given the inherent differences in the nature of our sources, the profiles of politics and political ideas that they offer are not necessarily congruent. Attempts to simplistically corroborate the evidence from one source with that of another have to be replaced by a more sophisticated intertextual analysis, which studies these sources in their detail and totality, taking into account the demands and conventions of genre, recognizing their specific perspective and

representational nature, and identifying elements of consonance as well as dissonance in their testimonies. Further, the history of ideas has to be firmly anchored in history; the complex interaction between political ideas and practice has to be tracked carefully, chronologically, historically, over the centuries. Vast as it is, a subcontinental canvas is not enough, because as we shall see in this book, certain texts and ideas traveled to other parts of Asia, and even beyond. Cross-cultural comparison is useful, not necessarily to establish genealogies, affinities, and analogies, but to help sharpen our understanding of what was historically and culturally unique.

The time is ripe for an approach that combines a focus on political history, on process, and on thought, and looks at the rich content and dynamic role of political ideas within and beyond the political sphere. Such an approach raises many questions. How are political ideas, especially those related to political violence, expressed in different kinds of historical sources? How did certain ideas become influential and pervasive parts of the cultural matrix, cutting across the particularities of specific states to inhabit and pervade a larger geopolitical sphere? What was the role of political thought in creating civilizational space? How can we identify and then accommodate in our discussion political ideas and practices that remained marginal or are only dimly hinted at in our sources? How can violence and reflections on violence enhance our understanding of ancient Indian political processes? How can we break out of the insularity of Indian history while discussing Indian political ideas? What is the place of ancient Indian political thought in the context of the ancient world? Does this exploration have something of value for understanding the problem of political violence in our own time?

The Investigation

This book is a history of ideas. The focus is on the ways in which violence in the political sphere featured as an issue of discussion and debate in ancient Indian political discourse during the period circa 600 BCE—600 CE.[27] Exploring the intellectual engagement with the problem of political violence opens a window to the larger conceptual universe of ancient states. And yet, political thought cannot be understood unless it is anchored to its historical context, telling us not only what the ideologues of empire thought, but also what rulers were actually doing. Therefore, this book is also a political history in which political ideas are given a central place. The main focus is on kingship and on the relationship between kingship and violence at a general level as well as specific ones. It should be emphasized right at the outset that the ancient texts do not necessarily situate all the issues discussed in this book within a frame of political violence. My aim is to investigate the arenas of internal and external state action that involved the use of force, punishment, or killing. Whether or not these were seen as equivalent to violence within the ancient Indian tradition remains to be seen.

Although I touch on the protohistoric background, taking into account the Harappan civilization (circa 2600–1900 BCE) and the political ideas in the Vedic corpus (circa 1500–500 BCE), my main interest is in the historic period, and within this, in the period between circa 600 BCE and 600 CE. The first three chapters give an integrated overview of the theory and practice of kingship and empire over these twelve hundred years, with special reference to how the problem of political violence was addressed. This is done on the basis of a detailed analysis of certain texts, inscriptions, coins, and artistic representations, which I see as dynamic, interacting, and important elements of the past, whose impact often transcended the specific time and place of their production. As the period discussed in this book generated an enormous range of material, all of which cannot be analyzed in detail, I have singled some out for special attention. While I have focused on the major Brahmanical and Buddhist texts, the equally important Jaina texts are discussed in a more general way. Similarly, although evidence from South India has been drawn into the discussion, there is a more detailed treatment of the northern

intellectual and cultural traditions.

The titles and time frames of the first three chapters correspond to three overarching and overlapping phases of political processes. Chapter 1, "Foundations," circa 600–200 BCE, deals with the emergence of early historic states in north and central India and, more especially, the Maurya empire. Chapter 2, "Transition," circa 200 BCE–300 CE, deals with a momentous period that was marked from the point of view of political history by the violent end of the Maurya dynasty and its replacement by the Shunga dynasty; a series of invasions from the northwest, which led to the establishment of the kingdoms of the Indo-Greeks, Pahlavas, Shakas, and Kushanas in parts of northwest and north India; the Chedi kingdom in Orissa in the east; the Satavahanas in the Deccan; and the Ikshvakus farther south. Chapter 3, "Maturity," circa 300–600 CE, covers the period that was dominated by the Gupta empire in the north and the Vakatakas in the Deccan, and when state formation spread to many other parts of the subcontinent. The mid-first millennium has been taken as the *terminum ad quem* of the discussion in this book because by that time, most of the key elements of what can be described as the classical Indian model of kingship and politics (subject to some degree of spatial and temporal variation) had emerged. The issues discussed in Chapters 1–3 include ideas of state and empire; theories of the origins and nature of kingship; violence and nonviolence in religious and political thought; the dharma of the king; the relationship between the king and the gods; power and renunciation; politics and emotions; and the relationship between governing the state and governing the self. The discussion of justice, punishment and the use of force against adversaries within the kingdom highlights attitudes towards force and violence *within* the state.

The dates of most of the texts discussed in this book are matters of continuing debate, and their composition often spilled over across more than one phase. Given this important caveat, I have accommodated my main textual and epigraphic sources into three overarching phases in the following manner:

Chapter 1: Foundation (circa 600 BCE–200 BCE)
- early Buddhist and Jaina texts
- Ashoka's inscriptions
- *Mahabharata*

Ramayana

Chapter 2: Transition (circa 200 BCE–300 CE)

Arthashastra
Manusmriti
Bhasa's plays
Buddhist texts: Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita; Ashokavadana; Jataka*
Inscriptions of Kharavela, Rudradaman, Satavahanas, and Ikshvakus

Chapter 3: Maturity (circa 300–600 CE)

Vakataka and Gupta inscriptions
Kamandaka's *Nitisara*
Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala* and *Raghuvamsha*
Vishakhadatta's *Mudrarakshasa*
Panchatantra

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus outward to two specific aspects of the political sphere, which saw continuous and overt conflict and violence—the state's involvement in warfare against other states, and its age-old conflict with the wilderness and its human and animal inhabitants. The time frame of both these chapters is from circa 600 BCE to 600 CE, and I examine some of the sources discussed in the first three chapters, along with some new ones, exploring their treatment of war and the wilderness. Chapter 4, "War," discusses issues such as the place of war in statecraft, war, and dharma, the heroic ideal, the code of honor, righteous war, critiques and pacifist arguments, the aestheticization and celebration of war, doubt and lament. These form the important ideological underpinnings of the violent internecine warfare that marks the political history of this period. Chapter 5, "The Wilderness," examines the relationship between the state and the wilderness, exploring the classifications of the forest, its place in larger normative schemes, the exploitation of forest resources, attitudes toward forest people, animals as political symbols, and the royal hunt. The larger argument is that violence or the threat of violence formed the basis of the state's complex interface with the forest.

The Epilogue examines the long-term impact of the ideas discussed in the five chapters, the travels and circulation of certain influential Indian political texts and ideas beyond the subcontinent, and the

extent to which the Indian debates on political violence spread to other lands. The book closes with a reflection on the questions with which my interest in exploring political violence in ancient India began. When and to what extent did ancient Indian discourse on political violence succeed in making it invisible, essential, even desirable? How do the debates on political violence in ancient Indian thought make us think differently about India's ancient history? To what extent do these debates constitute a resource for reflecting on the problem of political violence not only in the ancient world but in our own time?

CHAPTER ONE

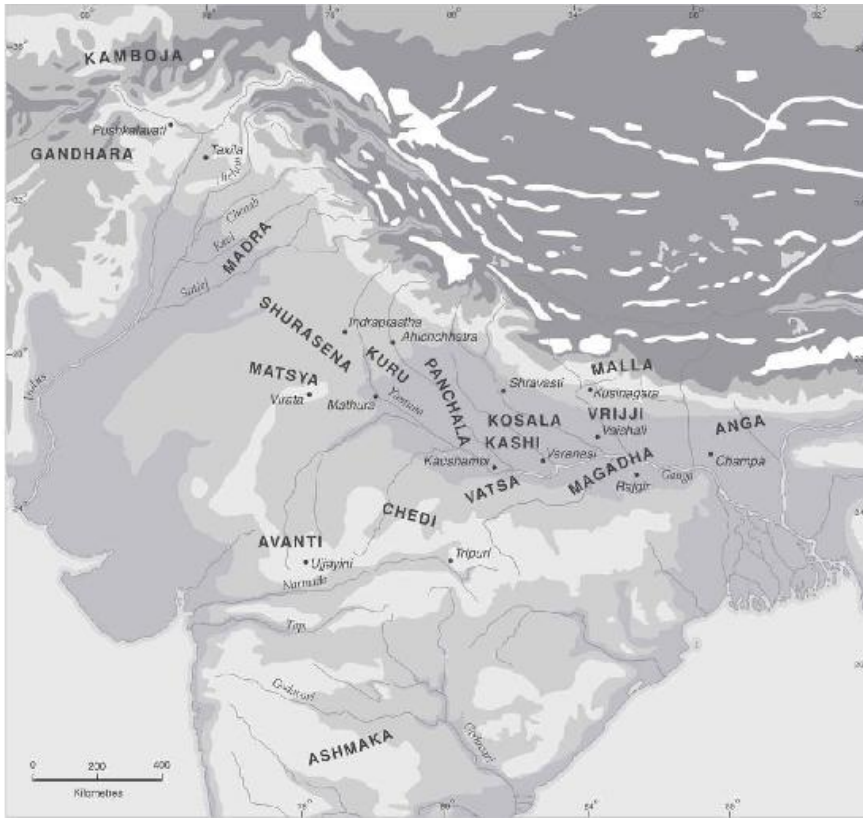
Foundation

RAJGIR'S MEMORIES go back over two and a half millennia. Located in a densely forested valley encircled by seven undulating hills, the landscape of this sleepy town in eastern India is picturesque enough. But ruins and legends alert us to other, momentous associations. In ancient times, there was a city here, known by many different names. While Girivraja (the enclosure of hills) points to its hill-girded location, Rajagriha (the abode of kings) announces it as the capital of the ancient kingdom of Magadha. There are spots connected with the legendary king Jarasandha and the god Krishna, as well as the early historic kings Bimbisara and Ajatashatru. The Buddha is said to have spent many months meditating on "Vulture's Hill." The first Buddhist council, held soon after his death, is supposed to have been held in a hall in front of the Sattapanni caves. Rajagriha is also believed to be the birthplace of the twentieth Jaina saint (*tīrthaṅkara*), Muni Suvrata, and the twenty-third Jaina saint, Mahavira, is said to have spent many a monsoon month here. An inscription and relief carvings of Jaina saints in the Son Bhandar caves indicate that Jaina ascetics lived here in the third and fourth century centuries. So Rajagriha was not only the capital of ambitious Magadhan kings who used violent means to enhance their political power. It was also associated with thinkers who emphasized renunciation and nonviolence.

The earliest states included kingdoms (*rājyas*) as well as oligarchies (*gaṇas* or *saṅghas*). If the city of Rajagriha epitomizes the former, Vaishali represents the latter. The sway of the powerful Vajji confederacy, of which the Lichchhavis were the foremost members, lay north of Magadha, across the Ganga, stretching into the Nepal hills. The capital Vaishali was located along a major trade route that

linked the Ganga valley with the lowlands of southern Nepal. Monarchies and oligarchies must have differed in military organization and patterns of land ownership.[1] But the most obvious and striking difference was the fact that in the oligarchies, power was shared among a group of proud aristocrats instead of being in the hands of a single king. Among the Lichchhavis there were many who went around proclaiming, "I am king, I am king!" Mahavira was born at Kundagrama in the Vaishali suburbs, and he and the Buddha are believed to have spent many rainy seasons in the city. A hundred years after the Buddha's death, the second Buddhist council was held here. Vaishali also has epic connections. In the *Ramayana,* Rama, Lakshmana, and the sage Vishvamitra are said to have come here before going to the court of king Janaka, where many princes were to vie with each other for the hand of the beautiful princess Sita.

During the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, cities and states emerged in a belt stretching from Gandhara in the northwest to Anga in eastern India, extending into central India and the Deccan. Buddhist and Jaina texts and the Brahmanical Puranas give lists of the sixteen great states (*mahājanapada*s) that included kingdoms and oligarchies (see Map 1).[2] Violence jostles with piety in the political narratives of the early historic period. Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina texts give accounts of the personality of rulers, their matrimonial alliances and their wars. While they differ in detail, it is significant that all three traditions engaged with political history, sought to establish claims over the most powerful kings, and denounced those they thought inimical to their cause.



MAP 1 The sixteen great states

From Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India from the Stone Age to the 12th Century;* Courtesy: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.

We hear of violent succession conflicts involving assassination, patricide, and people's revolt. The military capabilities and cruelty of certain kings are commented on. For instance, Bimbisara, king of the Haryanka dynasty of Magadha, has the title "Seniya" (one who has an army). Perhaps he replaced or supplemented the old hereditary warrior elite by recruiting a large standing army. According to Buddhist tradition, Bimbisara was killed by his son Ajatashatru at the instigation of the Buddha's wicked cousin Devadatta; Ajatashatru later sought absolution for his crime through confession to the Buddha. The four successors of Ajatashatru are also described as patricides. However, Jaina tradition describes Ajatashatru's successor, Udayin, as a devoted son, a follower of Jaina teachings, and given to pious acts such as fasting.

The Haryanka dynasty is said to have ended when the people drove out its last king and elevated a minister named Shishunaga to the

throne. Shishunaga's dynasty met a violent end—the king and his sons were killed and made way for the Nanda dynasty. Mahapadma, the first Nanda king, is described as having attained sole sovereignty and destroyed all the Kshatriyas.[3] This suggests that he asserted himself over the hereditary warrior elites and achieved an element of political paramountcy. Dhanananda, the last Nanda ruler, is described as militarily powerful, rich, greedy, cruel, and unpopular. Brahmanical texts talk about the low social origins of the Nandas and Mauryas, suggesting that the power of the old military aristocracies was broken by men from below, who succeeded in wresting power through the use of force and went on to extend their political control through aggressive and extensive military campaigns.

Our exploration of political ideas and practice in the historic period properly begins in the sixth century BCE. However, in order to understand the evolution of these ideas, it is necessary to go back to texts that were composed between the second and the first half of the first millennium BCE—the Vedas. The ideas in these texts form a prelude to classical Indian political thought.

The Vedic Prelude

The Vedic world is pervaded with conflict, war, and violence. The powerful and virile god Indra, who quaffs the intoxicating soma drink and smites his enemies such as the serpent demon Vritra with his thunderbolt, represents the strong masculine warrior ethos that pervades the *Rigveda,* the oldest of the four Vedas.[4] In the hymns of the *Rigveda,* the people who call themselves the *āryas* battle fiercely and incessantly among themselves and against other people whom they call *dāsas* and *dasyus*. Embedded within the liturgical hymns to the gods, explanatory ritual treatises, and philosophical tracts of the Vedic corpus are the earliest expressions of Indian political ideas and elements of an abstract political theorization.

The *Rigveda* has the idea of a principle called *ṛta* that governs the closely related orders of nature, the gods, humans, and sacrifice (*yajña*). The word "dharma" also occurs, but not in the sense that it acquired in later times. In line with its derivation from the root *dhṛ,* which means to support or maintain, it is associated with foundation —of the world and all beings; a foundation created by and for the sacrificial rituals, associated with certain gods and with royal authority. In later Vedic texts, the frequency of the word "dharma" decreased and its connotations shrank; it came to be especially connected with kingship and with the royal consecration ritual known as the *rājasūya.*[5]

The later strata of Vedic texts introduce the idea of a hierarchy of four hereditary social classes known as *varṇas*—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. A cosmogonic hymn refers to a primeval sacrifice in which a giant named Purusha was the victim. This sacrifice produced many things, including the planets, seasons, and animals.[6] Invoking powerful body symbolism, the Brahmana is described as being born from Purusha's mouth, the Rajanya (a synonym for Kshatriya) from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs, and the Shudra from his feet. In later times, the four *varṇas* came to be associated with a specific range of functions—the Brahmanas with Vedic learning and sacrifice; the Kshatriya with war and ruling; the Vaishya with agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade; and the Shudra with serving the upper three *varṇas* and performing various menial tasks. *Varṇa* remained the cornerstone of Brahmanical social

discourse for many centuries, long after the basis of social identity had moved toward class and caste.

Although rooted in a milieu of tribal warfare, early Vedic texts contain the ideas of extensive conquest, political paramountcy, and empire.[7] In the later strata of the Vedic corpus, we see the tribal or clan chieftain (*rājan*) metamorphose into a hereditary king, his power eventually eclipsing that of the tribal assemblies. It has been suggested that the Kurus of Vedic texts represent the first state in India.[8] The changes that eventually led to the emergence of monarchical states were closely connected with the emerging *varṇa* hierarchy and developments within kinship relations and the household.[9] Apart from the ceremony known as the *abhiṣeka,* wherein the king was anointed with the sprinkling of water, the complex symbolism of sacrifices such as the *rājasūya, vājapeya,* and *aśvamedha* included rites of regeneration and fertility, with the king standing at the center. They also involved the ritualization of political contest and violence and distanced the king from his kin and from the larger social and political community. The latter two sacrifices symbolically elevated the king to a position of a paramount ruler.[10] The composers of Vedic texts understood the complexities inherent in the relationship between the sacerdotal and secular realms of power and authority, known respectively as *brahma* and *kṣatra.* These were associated in the divine realm with the gods Mitra and Varuna and in the worldly sphere with the Brahmana and Kshatriya. This relationship involved hierarchy, complementarity, mutual dependence, tension, and conflict.[11]

Kings and chieftains usually appear in Vedic texts as warriors and rulers, as protectors of the Brahmanas and of their people, and as performers of sacrifices. But in the Upanishads (which are part of the Vedic corpus) the propounders, interlocutors, and receivers of the secret doctrine were not restricted to Brahmana sages; they include Kshatriyas and kings. It has been argued that the speculative mysticism of the Upanishads was inspired by the idea of absolute and universal kingship in the Rigvedic hymns.[12] This new philosophy emphasized a certain kind of esoteric knowledge, which was the path to liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth known as *saṁsāra.* It centered on the ideas of the eternal self (*ātman*) and the world soul (*brahman*). Although there are a few references to nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*), Upanishadic philosophy was essentially indifferent toward such issues.[13] The knowledge that these philosophers sought and struggled to describe was beyond ethics. It

was concerned with the inner, not the outer, world.

It has been suggested that Vedic sacrifice presents a “reform” of ritual practice, replacing the cyclical spirals of contest and violence and the oscillation of the sacrificial ritual between the settlement and the wilderness with a new, linear scheme. On the other hand, there is unequivocal evidence that Vedic ritual represents a masculine martial ideology that justified, promoted, and directed violence against people outside the tribe.[14] While unperturbed by the violence of war, the ritualistic texts display some concern about violence in the sacrificial arena. They deal with the problem by sacralizing, justifying, modifying, and euphemizing this violence, for instance, by eliminating the practice of human sacrifice and offering vegetal substitutes for animal victims.[15] The method of killing animal victims through strangulation so that they did not cry out seems to have emanated from the same concern. The Upanishads and Aranyakas discuss, debate, redefine, and interiorize sacrifice. Nevertheless, the precept of nonviolence is not central to the Vedic tradition.

Debates on violence and nonviolence accelerated and expanded with the emergence of early historic states and of private property in north India in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. These debates swiftly moved out of the sacrificial and ascetic arenas into other, larger domains, especially the political and social, and became the focus of a cultural conversation that to some extent cut across religious and sectarian divides. As we shall see further on, another culturally very important term—dharma—also had an interesting journey, moving from the ritual domain to the political and ethical domains. Questions were asked about the origins of kingship, the duties of the king, and the relationship between kingship and violence.

The Renunciatory and Ethical Turn

The sixth and fifth centuries BCE are the most fertile period in the history of ancient Indian thought. Philosophers debated the nature of life and the world with unprecedented and unparalleled vigor. The Buddha and Mahavira are the two best known because they are associated with religious traditions that are still flourishing today. Jainism is older than Buddhism; its origins are contemporaneous with Upanishadic thought. Rejecting Vedic sacrifice and the Brahmanas' claims to religious and social superiority, the teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha announced a break with the Vedic tradition. A significant aspect of these movements was a new, decisive way of looking at the relationship between power and knowledge, one that posited two poles of king and renouncer and declared the superiority of the latter over the former. From this time onward, renunciation became one of the most powerful and intensely debated ideas in Indian culture.[16] So did nonviolence.

Where precisely are the beginnings of the critique of violence and the corresponding valorization of nonviolence in the Indian tradition to be located? There are three answers to this question. One identifies the origins of the "nonviolence school" within the Brahmanical Vedic fold. Another sees it as emerging from a non-Vedic stream of thought, exemplified in non-Vedic asceticism and renunciation in general or in Buddhism and Jainism in particular. A third approach is to see nonviolence as an idea that developed more or less simultaneously in the Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions. The arguments hinge to some extent on the chronology of the early texts, which in turn, is connected with the date of the Buddha—a subject of continuing debate. The dating of the early texts remains a slippery slope.

Asceticism is known to the Vedic–Upanishadic tradition and must have been debated within Brahmana circles. Elements of renunciation were also (eventually) built into the classical prototype of the ideal Brahmana.[17] But this was after the "renunciatory turn" of the sixth century BCE. Jainism and Buddhism (and other sects like the Ajivikas) rejected the Vedic tradition and sacrifice and advocated salvation through lifelong celibate renunciation. By creating a monastic order for monks and nuns, they gave the renunciants who joined these orders an institutional organization and a strong sense of community

identity.

Jainism and Buddhism also introduced an extended, powerful, and systematic discourse on ethics, one in which nonviolence toward all beings was central. Nonviolence was an important part of practice for both the monastic and the lay communities, although it was recognized that the laity could not practice it as strictly. The primary concern was with the negative passions and motivations that led the perpetrator to engage in violent acts and their impact on his or her karma.

In early Buddhism, the distinction between wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) acts was based on the positive or negative motivations that lay behind such actions. Wholesome acts were those motivated by nonattachment, friendliness, and wisdom, while unwholesome acts were those motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion.[18] Killing living beings was an unwholesome act. Along with sexual intercourse, theft, and false proclamation of superhuman powers, it was one of the most serious offenses (known as *pārājika* offenses) that could be committed by a monk or nun. The result of such transgressions was permanent exclusion from the order. Acts of killing are graded according to the size and virtue of the victim, the intensity of the desire to kill, and the amount of effort used by the perpetrator.[19] The prohibition against violence was accompanied by an emphasis on the positive quality of friendship or loving kindness (*mettā*) that should be followed toward all beings, an attitude that is considered as having enormous power. The Metta Sutta tells us:

> Just as a mother would protect with her own life her only son, so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings and loving kindness towards all the world.[20]

Nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) was the first vow for members of the Jaina monastic order as well as the laity. The Jainas followed the principle of nonviolence with greater ardor than any other religious community because of their unique understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature. The universe is seen as inhabited by sentient beings ranging from humans with five senses to tiny organisms called *nigodas* that have single senses and whose life lasts for a fraction of a second. Apart from humans and animals, it is believed that plants, the earth, water, fire, and air are pervaded with

sentient beings. Harming organisms with different numbers of senses has different value. Thus, harming an animal is more serious than harming a single-sense *nigoda.*[21] Injuring living beings causes suffering to the victim as well as to the person who causes the injury. The laity were supposed to avoid harming beings that possessed two to four senses, but Jaina monks were supposed to take great care not to cause injury of any kind even to single-sense beings. They were also prohibited from thinking negative or exploitative thoughts about any being. Unlike their Buddhist counterparts, Jaina monks, nuns, and laity were supposed to observe strict vegetarianism.[22] At the same time, the Jainas developed an elaborate practice of the voluntary embrace of death; this was considered highly praiseworthy and not as suicide or violence toward the self.

When seen in the light of the Jaina view of reality, the principle of nonviolence becomes impossible to practice in absolute terms. Living beings are everywhere. How can one avoid harming or killing them? This problem was dealt with by classifying and qualifying violence in various ways. This includes distinguishing between causing involuntary injury and intentional harm; violence in self-defense, or in protection of the lives of monks or nuns. In the third century *Uttaradhyayana Sutra,* Harikesha, an untouchable who became a monk, is said to have been viciously attacked by Brahmanas when he was on his alms begging rounds. A deity intervened and beat up the Brahmanas. This is presented as an instance of necessary violence. Later Jaina texts debated various issues, including whether an omniscient person was capable of committing violence and whether the performance of worship (*pūjā*) in the course of building temples or involving offerings such as flowers and fruits should be considered violence. The responses to such problems include an emphasis on minimizing (rather than eliminating) violence; weighing violent acts against their outcome and benefits; and distinguishing between different levels of violence (external and internal) and different levels of truth—a mundane and a higher soteriological one.[23]

During circa 600–300 BCE, a section of the Brahmana intelligentsia invented a new and highly influential discipline called Dharmashastra, devoted to an explication and discussion of dharma.[24] The earliest texts of the Dharmashastra corpus are known as the Dharmasutras. It has been suggested that leaving aside two references in the *Chhandogya Upanishad,* nonviolence as an ethical precept appears for the first time in the Brahmanical tradition in these texts.[25] The

Dharmasutras connected dharma with the appropriate way of life and duties of the four *varṇas* and four life stages (*āśramas*), connections that were to remain a cornerstone of Brahmanical social ideology for centuries. The *āśramas* comprised the stages of *brahmacarya* (celibate studenthood), *gṛhastha* (the householder stage), *vānaprastha* (partial renunciation), and *saṁnyāsa* (complete renunciation). This was originally visualized as a voluntary system, involving a choice between four alternative life paths that a male belonging to the upper three *varṇas* could adopt. In its later, classical form, the *āśrama* scheme became a model of four consecutive life stages, with the householder becoming the central figure.[26] The idea of nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) features in the theory of the four life stages. The *brahmacārin* (celibate student) was supposed to avoid causing injury to living beings. The *gṛhastha* (householder) was supposed to perform the "five great sacrifices" (*pañca-mahāyajñas*) in order to expiate for the injury caused in various daily activities. These five great sacrifices, first mentioned in later Vedic texts, were sacrifices only in name and consisted of the study and teaching of the Veda (*brahma-yajña*), offerings to the ancestors (*pitṛ-yajña*), offerings made into the fire (*daiva-yajña*), oblations to all beings (*bhūta-yajña*), and honoring guests (*manuṣya-yajña*).[27] The purpose of these sacrifices, which were supposed to be performed every day by members of the upper three *varṇas*, is explained in later texts as atonement for the injury or death caused to life by the householder in the course of his daily routine in five places—the hearth, grinding stone, broom, mortar and pestle, and water jar.[28] This indicates an awareness of the problem of violence in everyday life and the use of ritual to atone for it.

The *vānaprastha* (partial renunciant) was supposed to be compassionate. The vows of a *saṁnyāsin* (renunciant) included avoiding injury to creatures through thought, word, or action. The fact that the *saṁnyāsin* was supposed to stay in one place during the monsoons and the regimen prescribed for him (for instance, walking with one or three staffs and straining his drinking water to avoid injuring any creatures) suggest an incorporation of Buddhist and Jaina monastic rules.[29] When we consider this along with the importance of *ahiṁsā* in Buddhism and Jainism, it is clear that the idea of nonviolence was strongly connected with renunciation. Nevertheless, there was always the larger question of the extent to which conventional moral imperatives (including *ahiṁsā*) remained relevant when one had attained the highest spiritual goal, namely liberation

from the cycle of birth and death.

The incorporation of renunciation into the Brahmanical tradition occurred not only through the formulation of the classical *āśrama* scheme, but also through the articulation of ideas such as that of internal renunciation (in the *Bhagavadgita*); and through the positing of equivalences and associations between renunciation and the performance of certain sacrifices, vows (*vratas*), and acts of penance (*prāyaścitta*).[30] As mentioned earlier, elements of renunciation were also woven into the model of the ideal Brahmana.[31] But the incorporation of renunciation into the Brahmanical fold was never complete, unequivocal, or unproblematic.

Over the following centuries, renunciants practicing different forms of disengagement from society appear as important figures in Indian cultural discourse, and the conflict between the life of the householder and renouncer and between the king and renouncer were debated vigorously. There are many questions: How did the debates on violence and nonviolence evolve and what were the different points of view? Was the focus on the consequences for the perpetrator or the victim or both? Was the ancient Indian "nonviolence lobby" concerned more with killing animals rather than with killing human beings? And what were the implications of the discourse on renunciation, violence, and nonviolence for the exercise of political power?

Kingship in the Jaina and Buddhist Traditions

The royal and Kshatriya elements are strong in both Buddhism and Jainism. Like Rama of the *Ramayana,* Siddhartha is said to have belonged to the Ikshvaku lineage. The Jaina tradition describes twenty-one of its twenty-four saints as belonging to this very lineage. Mahavira and Siddhartha both belonged to ruling families of lesser oligarchic states—Mahavira to the Jnatrika clan and Siddhartha to the Shakya clan. Apart from Mahavira, the Jaina saints Parshvanatha and Arishtanemi also belonged to royal families.[32] The life stories of these great men are marked by their emphatic rejection of royal power and worldly life in order to embark on a quest that culminated in their attainment of supreme knowledge. Buddhism and Jainism united and raised the relationship between kingship, renunciation, and nonviolence to a new level; they made it a central issue, one that continued to provoke and perplex Indian intellectuals for centuries. Kingship was firmly situated within the larger context of dharma, a term used by Buddhists and Jainas to refer to the totality of their respective doctrines.[33]

It cannot be a coincidence that the philosophies valorizing nonviolence initially flourished on oligarchic soil in eastern India. Was it because of the fact that these areas were less brahmanized than areas to the west and therefore open to free thinking of various kinds? Was there greater sympathy and support toward the ethic of nonviolence in the oligarchic east because of a significantly higher incidence of violence of various kinds? Did the fact that Mahavira and the Buddha belonged to the ruling class give them greater exposure and therefore greater sensitivity toward violence? It is ironic that the arch perpetrators of violence—namely, kings—extended support and patronage to Buddhism and Jainism. Whether this reflects a special awareness of the problem of political violence, or whether the ethic of nonviolence was not an important part of the impact of Buddhism and Jainism on political culture are issues that need reflection. In any case, the new philosophies did not remain confined to oligarchies, eastern India, or ruling elites. They—especially Buddhism—spread like wildfire all over the subcontinent, where they came to enjoy considerable royal as well as nonroyal patronage.

In terms of social status, Buddhism and Jainism see the Kshatriya as

superior to the Brahmana. Both traditions have the idea of the great man (*mahāpuruṣa*), who can be either a world victor or world renouncer. But neither tradition leaves any doubt that the status of a great king comes nowhere close to the achievement of one who has attained supreme knowledge. The world renouncer decisively trumps the world victor. The early texts of the Jaina canon are difficult to date but deserve careful study. The Jaina tradition is more pronounced than the Buddhist in its pro-Kshatriya and anti-Brahmana stance. Mahavira is said to have initially been conceived in the womb of a Brahmana woman named Devananda. But at the orders of the god Indra, the embryos in the wombs of Devananda and the Kshatriya queen Trishala were exchanged, because great men, including *cakravartin*s (paramount kings) and *arhat*s (those who had attained enlightenment), could not possibly be born in low, poor, or Brahmana families.[34]

The Jaina tradition gives a list of great kings and *cakravartin*s who renounced kingship and attained perfection, some of them even becoming *tīrthaṅkara*s.[35] King Nami of Mithila attained enlightenment while a king and renounced the world, creating an uproar. The god Indra came before Nami and urged him to return to his palace and worldly life. He urged him to be a true Kshatriya—to fortify his capital, augment his riches, build palaces and fine buildings, punish wrongdoers, subdue his enemies, perform great sacrifices, and feed ascetics and Brahmanas. But the royal sage rebutted each and every argument. He was firm in his resolve to turn away from kingship and from the world.

> "Pleasures are the thorn that rankles, pleasures are like a venomous snake; he who is desirous of pleasures will not get them, and will come to a bad end at last."[36]

The core of the Pali *Tipitaka* of the Buddhist Theravada school was composed between the fifth and third centuries BCE. This corpus of texts abounds in mention of mythical as well as historical kings. The latter appear as interlocutors, patrons, givers of gifts, and followers of various philosophers. Although the Buddha taught a doctrine of detachment, Buddhism was never detached from the political sphere. On the contrary, from its very inception, it was obsessed with the ideas of kingship and paramountcy. The Buddha is described as being

on good terms with contemporary monarchs such as Bimbisara and Ajatashatru of Magadha and Prasenajit of Kosala. Bimbisara was an especially generous patron, gifting the bamboo grove of Veluvana to the sangha (the Buddhist monastic order), and the Buddha is said to have made several monastic rules in response to his requests. Bimbisara is also a model king: enjoying widespread fame, he is righteous and lawful; a friend to Brahmanas, householders, town and country folk; a meticulous follower of the Buddha's teaching; and devoted to the Buddha, dhamma (the Pali form of "dharma," here to be understood as comprising the doctrine taught by the Buddha), and sangha.[37] But apart from references to specific kings, early Buddhist texts also theorize about the origins and nature of kingship, and it is to this theorizing that we now turn.

As indicated at the beginning of this book, the wheel (*cakra*) is a multivalent symbol with deep roots in the Indian cultural tradition. We hear in many texts of the *cakravartin,* the great paramount king, whose chariot wheels roll everywhere unimpeded, and who is victorious over the four quarters of the earth.[38] Buddhism made the idea of the *cakkavatti* (the Pali form of the Sanskrit *cakravartin*) and his wheel central to its politico-ethical discourse. Jaina texts also talk about the *cakravartin,* the great emperor who follows the wheel and brings the whole earth under his sway without indulging in violence.

In early Buddhist texts, at any given time, there can be only one Buddha and one *cakkavatti* in the world, and both have their own wheel. The two wheels reflect an important division of labor and complement each other; they can also follow each other sequentially.[39] Both the Buddha and the *cakkavatti* are charismatic men whose greatness is visible in the thirty-two signs that can be seen on their body.[40] In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha, who is on the verge of death, finally replies to his disciple Ananda's repeated, anxious inquiries about the practical matter of his funeral. He tells Ananda that his post-cremation remains should be treated like those of a *cakkavatti*—they should be placed in a stupa (funerary mound) built at the crossroads, and those who went there and made offerings of garlands, perfumes, or colored paste would be rewarded with enduring benefit and joy.[41] But unlike the funerary remains of great kings, the bodily relics of the Buddha and the stupas they were embedded in became places of cultic worship and pilgrimage. These relics were coveted, distributed, and redistributed; they became objects of competition, contention, and conflict. Although there are frequent parallels between the *cakkavatti* and the Buddha in the Buddhist tradition, there is never any doubt about the Buddha's superiority. This is because he had attained salvation and taught others how to do the same. The raison d'être of the *cakkavatti* is to implement the Buddha's dhamma in his realm. Dhamma—the Buddha's teaching—is the king of the *cakkavatti* king.[42]

Early Buddhism associates the *cakkavatti* with the seven treasures (*ratana*): the wheel, elephant, horse, jewel, woman, landed householder, and the counselor / adviser.[43] The seven treasures of the *cakkavatti* are further correlated with the seven treasures of the *arhat,*

which lead to enlightenment: mindfulness, discrimination of states, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.[44] While the king's power and authority are proclaimed through the seven treasures and ceremonial insignia (such as the flag, conch, throne, and umbrella), the Buddha does not require any outer paraphernalia as advertisement.

The wheel of power could merge into the wheel of dhamma only by abandoning, renouncing everything that political power involved and entailed. A *cakkavatti* could match a Buddha only if he renounced the world and attained enlightenment—that is, if he became a Buddha. Three Buddhist dialogues (*suttas*) are of special importance in understanding the development of early Buddhist ideas of kingship and empire—the Agganna Sutta, Mahasudassana Sutta, and Chakkavatti Sihanada Sutta. The king's victories, dhamma, and punishment figure in these.

The Agganna Sutta in the *Digha Nikaya* takes us back to a time long ago when there was water and darkness everywhere and describes the systematic fall of beings from a state of perfection, due to their greed and arrogance.[45] At some point in time, theft, accusation, lying, and punishment made their appearance. The beings assembled and lamented this situation and decided to appoint one man who would punish those who deserved punishment; in return, they would give him a portion of their rice.

> "Then, monks, [the Buddha said], those beings went to the one among them who was the most handsome and good-looking, most charismatic and with the greatest authority and said, 'come, being, (you) criticize whoever should be criticized, accuse whoever should be accused, and banish whoever should be banished; we will (each) hand over to you a portion of rice.' He agreed (and did as they asked); they (each) gave him a portion of rice."[46]

This ruler was given the designation Mahasammata, which means "the Great Elect," or "one who has been elected or appointed by the people." Another term that came to be used for this kind of man was Khattiya (Kshatriya), "lord of the fields." Mahasammata seems to have been a word that referred to the Kshatriya class in general as well as to the king in particular. The third term to appear was *rājā,* which, the

Buddha explained, means one who brings enjoyment to people according to dhamma. Having explained the origins of kingship and the Kshatriyas, the Agganna Sutta explains the origin of the other three *varṇas* and the community of renunciants on the basis of their aptitudes and actions. The Buddha emphasizes that

> "for those who rely on clan, the Kshatriya is the best in this world;
>
> (but) the person endowed with wisdom and (good) conduct is the best in the whole universe."[47]

The constant refrain in this dialogue that the dhamma is the best thing in this world and in the future leaves no doubt that it is not the king, but dhamma, that reigns supreme.

The Agganna Sutta has been seen as a self-conscious Buddhist rejoinder to Brahmanical ideas of cosmogony and social order, marked by elements of satire and irony. In describing the regression and fall of beings, propelled by the vices of greed, arrogance, lust, and sloth, it emphasizes the negative human propensities from the point of view of Buddhist ethics and doctrines. Kingship is described as a manmade institution based on the pragmatic need for the maintenance of order. The king is endowed with charisma and authority—qualities that are, significantly, also associated with the Buddha. There is the idea of a social contract between the king and the people—the king levies taxes in return for the maintenance of social order and prevents transgressions against private property. The king of the Agganna Sutta is primarily a punisher.

More influential than the idea of Mahasammata were the ideas of kingship described in two other dialogues in the *Digha Nikaya*—the Mahasudassana Sutta and Chakkavatti Sihanada Sutta, where two ideas appear in combination: that of the *cakkavatti* (world victor) and the *dhammiko dhammarāja,* the righteous king who rules according to morality. The great king has an extensive empire but is also benevolent and just. The rod of force is replaced by the wheel. B. G. Gokhale argues that this was the Buddhist solution to the problem of the overwhelming power of the king.[48] The state was made a moral institution.

The Mahasudassana Sutta is set in a grove of sal trees in Kusinara, just before the Buddha's demise.[49] The Buddha tells his disciple

Ananda that Kusinara was once a great city named Kusavati, ruled by a great king named Mahasudassana. On a certain auspicious day, a magnificent wheel treasure with a thousand spokes appeared before him. The king followed the wheel with his fourfold army as it rolled in the different directions. Wherever the wheel stopped, kings welcomed Mahasudassana and invited him to rule over them. The king responded with a message of Buddhist piety, instructing his new subjects to refrain from taking life, taking what was not given, sexual misconduct, lying, consuming strong alcoholic drinks, and over-eating. One by one, the other six treasures then appeared before Mahasudassana.

The king reached the heights of power and opulence but started wondering about the karma that had made him so powerful, and concluded that it consisted of three kinds of actions: liberality, self-control, and abstinence. He stood at the door of the great gabled chamber in his palace and exclaimed:

> "May the thought of lust cease! May the thought of ill-will cease! May the thought of cruelty cease! Thus far and no further the thought of lust, of ill-will, of cruelty!"[50]

He sat on the golden couch, and detaching himself from the objects of the senses and unwholesome mental states, he attained, one by one, the four meditative states (*jhānas*). He emerged from the gabled chamber, transformed.

> Thus he stayed, spreading the thought of loving-kindness, above, below and across, everywhere, always with a mind filled with loving-kindness, abundant, magnified, unbounded, without hatred or ill-will. And he did likewise with compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.[51]

Mahasudassana continued to rule over 84,000 cities, with all the trappings of power, foremost among which were the seven treasures, but he took care of the needy, and reduced his entourage of 84,000 elephants to 44,000. Thus he ruled for hundreds of thousands of years.

The next decisive turning point occurred when queen Subhadda decided to go and meet her husband, whom she had not seen for a

long time. She went to his Dhamma palace accompanied by a fourfold army and female attendants. There was another threshold moment: as the queen stood leaning in the doorway, she saw the king lying on a golden couch. Fearing that he was dead or dying, she reminded him of his royal possessions and urged him to want to continue to live. The king denounced her words and told her that she should urge him instead to abandon desire and longing. The queen sorrowfully obeyed, and Mahasudassana died peacefully. Mahasudassana was none other than the Buddha himself in a previous life. Even then, at the height of his power and wealth, he had turned his back on kingly life and desire. Kingship was not enough.

While the Mahasudassana Sutta describes a pious *cakkavatti* king who turns his back on power, the Chakkavatti Sihanada Sutta tells us what happens when a king does not follow the prescribed path, especially when he decides to think for himself.[52] It tells the story of the lineage of a king named Dalhanemi. Like Mahasudassana, Dalhanemi was a righteous king who established security in his domain and ruled for hundreds of thousands of years. He attained victory over the entire earth up to the oceans through dhamma, without the use of force, and had over a thousand heroic sons. He possessed the seven treasures, foremost among which was the wheel. One day, Dalhanemi saw that the wheel treasure had slipped from its position. The king recognized this as a sign that he did not have much time to live, and handing the reins of power over to his son, he became a renouncer. Seven days later, the wheel vanished. The new king went to Dalhanemi, now a royal sage, and asked him for advice. Dalhanemi told him that if he performed the duties of a noble wheel-turning monarch, if he ruled according to dhamma, the wheel would reappear. He urged his son to prevent crime, give property to the needy, consult ascetics and Brahmanas, avoid evil, and do what was good. The king followed this advice and the wheel treasure reappeared.

During the reigns of the six successive kings, the slipping, vanishing, and reappearance of the wheel was repeated. But something different happened during the reign of the seventh king. When the wheel treasure disappeared, the king grieved, but he did not go to his father to ask him about the duties of a wheel-turning monarch.

> Instead, he ruled the people according to his own ideas, and, being so ruled, the people did not prosper so well as they had done under the previous kings who had performed the duties of a wheel-turning monarch.[53]

Going against the advice of his ministers, he fulfilled his duties only in part—he protected his people, but did not give property to the needy. This led to poverty, theft, capital punishment, and killing. People's lifespan and beauty decreased. The vices of lying, speaking evil of others, adultery, harsh speech, idle chatter, greed, hatred, false opinions, incest, and deviant practices made their appearance. Morality disappeared. Evil and violence prevailed everywhere.

The story now shifts to predicting future calamities and brutal behavior. When things will reach their nadir, the Buddha predicts, some beings will decide to turn back the tide of vice. With increasing virtue, lifespan and beauty will increase. A king named Sankha will come to rule in Ketumati (the future name of Varanasi) as a *cakkavatti* monarch, and a Buddha named Metteyya (Maitreya) will be born. King Sankha will become a renunciant under the guidance of Metteyya.

All three dialogues—the Agganna, Mahasudassana, and Chakkavatti Sihanada Suttas—refer to the king as a Kshatriya. Mahasammata is an abstract kingly figure, and we are not given any details about his life. Mahasudassana rules for a long time and eventually turns his back on political power. The descendants of Dalhanemi have to face the consequences of not following all the tenets of dhamma and ultimately return to the trodden path. But the future king Sankha will renounce the world under the tutelage of Metteyya Buddha. Renunciation is ultimately essential, even for the truly great king. Nonviolence is not emphasized.

Nonviolence (*ahiṁsā, avihiṁsā*) is one of the cardinal Buddhist precepts. It applies to monks and laypersons and therefore, also to the king. The idea of violence includes that which is physical, verbal, and mental. The bodily conduct that causes unwholesome states to increase and wholesome states to diminish includes being murderous and bloody-handed, prone to inflicting blows and violence, killing living beings, and being merciless to them. Verbal conduct that causes unwholesome states to increase includes harsh, hurtful, offensive, or malicious speech and creating discord. Unwholesome mental conduct includes covetousness, ill-will, hatred, and thoughts of harming or killing.[54] On the other hand, righteous conduct that is in accordance with dhamma causes the diminishing of unwholesome states and the increase of wholesome states.

> Here someone, abandoning the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gently and kindly, he abides compassionate to all living beings.[55]

The imperative to adopt righteous conduct and to avoid negative conduct is based on the consequences of actions that are determined by the laws of karma. A person who has negative propensities, who is prone to anger and hostility, who kills living beings and is violent, murderous, or merciless toward them, who injures them with his hand, clod, stick, or knife, suffers an unhappy afterlife, marked by deprivation, even hell. If born in a human body, he is sickly, ugly, uninfluential. One who abstains from killing living beings, lays aside rod and weapon, and is gentle, kind, and compassionate, enjoys a happy afterlife, and if born as a human, is long-lived, healthy, beautiful, respected, and influential.[56]

Benevolence to all beings, including humans and animals, is part of the Buddhist ideal for all, whether monk, nun, or layperson, including the king. Buddhist texts frequently critique the killing of animals, especially in sacrifice. In the Kutadanda Sutta, we see the Brahmana Kutadanda all set to perform a great sacrifice—700 bulls, bullocks, heifers, he-goats, and rams are tied to the sacrificial posts, ready for slaughter. The Buddha arrives on the scene and tells him the story of a king named Mahavijita who wanted to perform a grand sacrifice but

was dissuaded by his chaplain, who explained the many imponderables involved and convinced the king to instead perform a bloodless sacrifice in which there was no violence toward animals or humans.[57] The Buddha goes on to reveal that he was that chaplain in an earlier birth. He adds that there are other kinds of acts that are simpler and more efficacious than *yajña* (sacrifice), such as giving gifts to ascetics; providing shelter for the monastic order; taking refuge in the Buddha, dhamma, and sangha; and following the Buddhist precepts. Redefining *yajña,* he asserts that attaining enlightenment is the highest sacrifice. The Brahmana realizes the futility of the bloody sacrifice that he was about to perform and releases all the animals.

The *Samyutta Nikaya* explicitly raises the issue of political violence. We are told that once, when the Buddha was living among the Kosalans in a small hut in the forest in the Himalayas, he wondered:

> Is it possible to exercise rulership righteously: without killing and without instigating others to kill, without confiscating and without instigating others to confiscate, without sorrowing and without causing sorrow?[58]

The evil being Mara, through his powers, read this thought in the Buddha's mind, and approached him, urging him that he (the Buddha) was indeed capable of exercising such rulership on account of his spiritual powers.[59] But the temptation did not work. In the Buddha's musings, we see a direct recognition of the problem of political violence; the story suggests that a king cannot, in fact, rule without engaging in violence.

In theory, the great *cakkavatti* was victorious everywhere through justice, without the use of weapons.[60] But, as we shall see in later chapters, the Buddhist tradition recognized the difficulty—in fact the impossibility—of a king ruling without the use of force. How were kings to deal with the problem of political violence in the light of an ethical code that emphasized nonviolence? We are fortunate in having an answer to this question in the edicts of an emperor who was a devout follower of the Buddha's teaching—Ashoka.

Ashoka and His Piety Propaganda

The expansion of the Magadhan empire, which began under the Haryanka, Shaishunaga, and Nanda dynasties, culminated in the fourth century BCE under the Mauryas (circa 324 / 321–187 BCE), who created the first virtually subcontinental empire in Indian history. The military foundations of this empire were laid by Chandragupta, who came to power soon after the invasion of northwestern India by Alexander of Macedon (circa 327 / 326 BCE), and Chandragupta was followed by his son and successor, Bindusara. But the first two Maurya rulers have been eclipsed in fame by the third king, Ashoka (circa 268–232 BCE).

Apart from archaeological remains, coins, and references in Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jaina texts, the principal sources for the Maurya period are Megasthenes' *Indica,* Kautilya's *Arthashastra,* and Ashoka's edicts. Generally considered the ambassador of the Hellenistic king Seleucus Nicator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, Megasthenes actually may have been associated with Sibyrtius, the Macedonian satrap of Arachosia.[61] His *Indica* is a lost text, known only through citations in later works such as the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Sicilus, *Geographica* of Strabo, *Anabasis* of Arrian, and *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a normative political treatise traditionally considered as belonging, at least in part, to the Maurya period, but as its composition seems to extend into the early centuries CE and since it marks a significant and innovative advance in the development of Indian political thought, it will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, we will concentrate on the most reliable contemporary source for political ideas and practice under the Mauryas—the emperor Ashoka's words inscribed on stone.

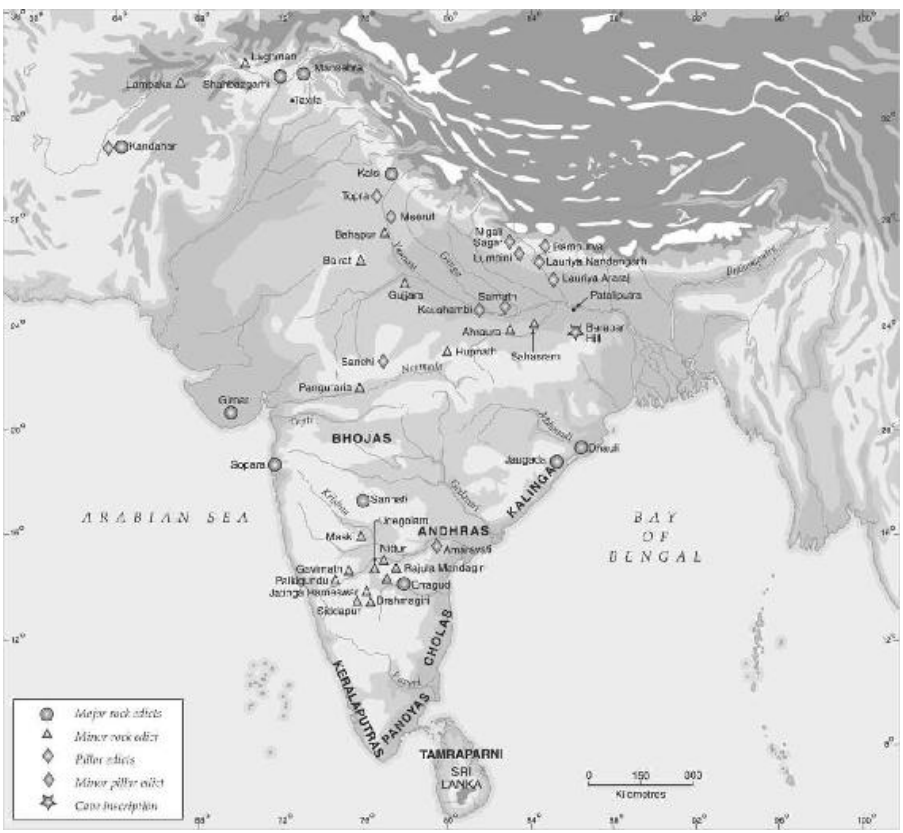
The king is most frequently known in his edicts by his epithets *devānaṁpiya,* which means "dear to the gods," and *piyadasi,* which can be variously translated as "he who looks upon at that which is beloved / dear / auspicious," "he who looks affectionately or amiably," or, given the unstandardized usage of the time, "one who is dear to look at."[62] The Prakrit "Asoka" (of which "Ashoka" is the better-known Sanskritized form), which literally means "without sorrow," occurs in only four inscriptions and is considered the king's personal name.

Ashoka's inscriptions represent the earliest corpus of royal inscriptions in the Indian subcontinent, and in this respect, are an important political innovation.[63] Writing was probably known in the subcontinent from about the sixth or fifth century BCE, and it is possible that some of the pillars considered "Ashokan" actually predate him (the king mentions having had his edicts engraved on preexisting pillars).[64] However, there is no doubt that Ashoka initiated a massive, sustained policy of epigraphic proclamations.

Ashoka saw himself as an enlightened and energetic new-age monarch who would leave an indelible mark on history. He was keen that the impact of his thoughts and words should transcend time. Historians have classified his inscriptions into minor rock edicts, major rock edicts, separate rock edicts, major pillar edicts, minor pillar edicts, and cave inscriptions. The messages embodied in the edicts were not considered specific to a single place as individual and sets of inscriptions are repeated in several places. The rock edicts usually occur in broadly similar sets of fourteen edicts, except at Dhauli and Jaugada, where rock edict 13 is replaced by separate rock edict 1 and 2.[65] The pillar edicts usually occur in sets of six, except for the Delhi-Topra pillar, which has seven edicts. Internal chronological references indicate that the minor rock edicts were the earliest, followed by the major rock edicts, and then the major pillar edicts; the cave inscriptions and minor pillar edicts were inscribed at various points in time. Most of the inscriptions are in the Brahmi script and in dialects of Prakrit, which remained the language of political power in the subcontinent for several centuries before it was eventually replaced by Sanskrit. Mansehra and Shahbazgarhi in Pakistan have sets of rock edicts in the Prakrit language and Kharoshthi script. The northwestern part of the empire (which included areas of modern Pakistan and Afghanistan) also yielded one Greek, four Aramaic, one Greek–Aramaic, and one Aramaic–Prakrit inscription.[66] The single most important thing that Ashoka's edicts talk about is dhamma (Prakrit for "dharma"), which is here best understood as virtue or goodness. The emperor wanted everyone to think, hear, and talk about dhamma. He sought to make dhamma central to public discourse all over his empire, and even outside it. The Aramaic inscriptions use the words *dāta* and *qšṭ* in place of dhamma; the Greek term used is *eusebeia*.[67]

Ashoka propagated his dhamma messages in written form at multiple key points in the empire, at places that had a long-term

importance on trade routes and in the religious and / or political landscape (see Map 2). The major rock edicts are distributed mostly along or near the margins of the empire. The pillar edicts are concentrated in north India. They seem to have been associated with Buddhist monasteries and were often located near urban centers and along trade routes. The minor rock edicts have the widest distribution, with a notable clustering in the Andhra–Karnataka area in the south. They are generally found in more remote hilly areas, at sites that seem to have had an older cultic significance. The places where Ashoka's edicts were inscribed were all "happening places." But given the presumably low literacy levels of the time and the fact that the inscriptions were often made on the surface of rocky outcrops or high up on pillars, far beyond eye level, they would have been difficult to read, whichever language and script they were written in.



MAP 2 Locations of Ashoka's inscriptions

From Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India from the Stone Age to the 12th century;* Courtesy: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.

The epigraphic form of Ashoka's dhamma message coexisted with documentary forms maintained in administrative offices. Further, the many references in the inscriptions to speaking and hearing the dhamma message indicate that it also circulated in oral form. In fact, the oral dhamma propagation machinery set up by Ashoka was potentially much more influential and effective than his words on stone. The need to have the edicts inscribed at various places was to provide multiple permanent, indelible reference points, mainly for the propagation of dhamma by Ashoka's officials, as well as for his successors. Officials, including a special cadre of dhamma officers (*dhamma-mahāmātas*), which was established thirteen years after Ashoka's consecration, were instructed to spread the king's dhamma among the people.[68] The king himself moved around the countryside, incessantly instructing his subjects in dhamma. Minor rock edict 1 tells us that he had spent 256 nights (or days) on tour, no doubt busy spreading dhamma. The time he must have spent roaming around his empire, giving dhamma lectures, and his steadily increasing obsession with making his subjects—indeed the whole world—good must have made Ashoka impatient with the routine affairs of governance.

While Ashoka's inscriptions represent a new and powerful attempt at imperial communication, the king was not really trying to speak directly to his people. The audience of the edicts consisted of three parts—the direct audience (high-ranking administrative officials); the indirect audience (the mass of the emperor's subjects), who were expected to receive their king's message via various intermediaries, largely in oral form; and the future audience (posterity). High-level official cadres in most parts of the empire were evidently familiar with the Prakrit language and Brahmi script. In the northwest (which had come under Persian and Greek influence in the preceding centuries), Aramaic and Greek were the languages of a multilingual officialdom.

The personality of ancient Indian kings is usually difficult to identify behind their carefully crafted epigraphic masks. Ashoka is an exception. The frequent use of the first person and the strong personal tone in his Prakrit inscriptions leave no doubt that they were not composed by an inspired ghost-writer but represent the emperor's ideas, desires, and commands, tempered occasionally by a candor and self-reflectiveness that mitigates their increasingly authoritarian tone.[69] Ashoka's edicts give us a unique insight into the emperor's mind. We can actually follow his thoughts as he reflects on and agonizes over issues related to kingship and morality over his long,

thirty-six-year reign.[70] Although he occasionally invoked ancient tradition, Ashoka saw himself as an innovator, as a great king who had ushered in a new era, intervening in and reversing a long course of human depravity and moral decline. The absence of a genealogy in his inscriptions shows that he was not interested in looking back. He looked forward to his successors following his new model of kingship.

Historians have drawn the rough contours of Ashoka's empire on the basis of the distribution and content of his edicts.[71] The northwestern limit of the edicts extends to modern Afghanistan, the eastern limit to Orissa, and there is a dense clustering of the minor rock edicts on the Andhra–Karnataka border in the south. Ashokan inscriptions and the archaeological evidence of the spread of a deluxe pottery known as Northern Black Polished Ware indicate Maurya contact, but joining the dots of the outermost limits where the edicts have been found does not necessarily give us an area within which there was prolonged or effective Maurya political, military, or fiscal control. The king seems to have had a multitiered administrative hierarchy in the capital with several provincial centers; the level of actual political and economic control exercised by the central and the provincial administrations must have varied considerably. This is in spite of the fact that Ashoka's style of governance had a significant peripatetic quality, with the king, his various officials, and inspection teams constantly on the move.

Ashoka describes himself as "king of Magadha" and mentions his capital city, Pataliputra, conveying a sense of territoriality. He boasts of the vast extent of his political dominion.[72] He had an idea of political borders, distinguishing his own political realm from that of adjacent kingdoms.[73] In the south, the "borderers" included the principalities of the Cholas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, Keralaputras, and Tamraparni (Sri Lanka). The emperor's geopolitical awareness extended westward beyond the subcontinent to northern Africa and the Mediterranean lands. In the northwest, there was the Yona (Greek) king Antiyoka and beyond him, the lands ruled over by Turamaya, Antikini, Maka, and Alikasudara.[74]

Even if we ignore the collective testimony of the later Buddhist textual tradition, several of Ashoka's inscriptions unequivocally indicate his affiliation with Buddhism. In minor rock edict 1, the king tells us that he had been a lay follower of the Buddha's teaching for over two and a half years, but confesses that he had initially not made much progress. He goes on to say that since a little over the past year,

he had drawn closer to the Buddhist sangha and that gods and men had come to mingle due to his zealous efforts.

Soon the king was addressing the sangha and giving it commands.

> Piyadasi, the king of Magadha, greets the members of the sangha, and hopes that they are in good health and comfort. You know, sirs, how deep is my reverence and faith in the Buddha, the dhamma, and the sangha.[75]

This minor rock edict goes on to state that what had been said by the Buddha was well-said and describes the Buddha's teachings as the true dhamma. It lists six Buddhist sermons on dhamma that Ashoka wanted the laity and monks and nuns to listen to and reflect on. There is debate about the identification of the six texts. But there is no doubt about the close resemblance between the code of conduct prescribed in the edicts and that prescribed for the laity in the Buddhist Sigalavada Sutta. The king reveals (rock edict 8) that his dhamma tours began after his pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment. Ashoka's allegiance to Buddhism is also displayed by the minor pillar edicts at Lumbini (the Buddha's birthplace) and at the site of a stupa dedicated to Buddha Kanakamuni at Nigali Sagar. The imperious tone of the "schism edict" (minor pillar edict 1), warning monks and nuns against creating dissension in the sangha, indicates the authority Ashoka exercised over the Buddhist monastic order.[76] But what was the impact of Ashoka's Buddhist leanings on his political ideas and practice, especially when it came to the issue of violence?

Ashoka had two ideas of empire—one political, the other moral, with the latter encompassing the former. His conception of his constituency extended beyond political subjecthood to all living beings (*pāṇas*, *jīvas*, *bhūtas*), including both humans and animals. His claim that his campaign of *dhamma-vijaya* (victory through dhamma), which consisted of propagating and inculcating virtue and goodness among people, had been a resounding success everywhere indicates that the moral empire required no political, geographical, or territorial specification or circumscription. The edicts oscillate between issues related to the political and moral empires, but there is no doubt that ultimately, it was the moral aspect of both the individual and the state that Ashoka considered most important.

The edicts occasionally touch on practical issues such as taxation and the administration of justice, but Ashoka was not as interested in such things as he was in morality. He boldly made morality the cornerstone of his political agenda—inscribed lists of virtues on stone, reiterated them in far-flung areas, and set up a massive propaganda machine to propagate them. His welfare measures—the provision of medical treatment, the planting of herbs, trees, and roots for men and animals, and the digging of wells along roads (rock edict 2)—and his dhamma-propagation activities extended into the kingdoms of other rulers. This clearly indicates that Ashoka thought his moral jurisdiction extended far beyond his political domain.

Buddhist legend presents us with an exceptionally violent man, Ashoka the cruel, who was transformed into a pious Buddhist king (this will be discussed in the next chapter). Ashoka's own inscriptions suggest a more gradual movement toward Buddhism and the practice and propagation of dhamma. But one of the inscriptions—rock edict 13—does highlight a transformative moment—a terrible war that was fought in Kalinga in eastern India, eight years after Ashoka had been consecrated.[77] The eventual result of the king's somber reflection on this event was his renunciation of war and his resolve to spread dhamma far and wide. The edicts announce Ashoka as the prophet, exemplar, and propagator of dhamma; officials and subjects must follow his orders and his behavior. An elaborate apparatus involving the king, regular officials, and the specially created cadre of officials known as the *dhamma-mahāmātas* was set up for the propagation of

goodness. The king was obsessed, and the entire state machinery catered to his obsession.

Ashoka recognized the close connection between the individual and society and between virtuous dispositions and actions. While the dhamma of his inscriptions can be understood as goodness or virtue, the imperative to pursue it endowed it with the sense of duty.

> Obedience to mother and father is good. Generosity to friends, acquaintances and kin, and to Brahmanas and renunciants [*samaṇas*] is good. Abstaining from killing living beings is good. Spending little and owning little is good.[78]

Ashoka explains the gift of dhamma as including

> proper courtesy to slaves and servants, obedience to mother and father, generosity to friends, acquaintances and kin, as well as to Brahmanas and renunciants, and abstaining from killing living beings. In this respect, whether one is a father, son, brother, friend, acquaintance, relative or neighbor, one should say "This is good; this should be done."[79]

Putting together the statements scattered across the edicts, we get a clear sense of Ashoka's idea of dhamma. It included qualities such as self-control, purity of thought, liberality, gratitude, firm devotion, truthfulness, and purity. It also included behavior that was appropriate to certain key social relationships: obedience to parents; respect for elders; courtesy and liberality toward Brahmanas and renunciants; courtesy to slaves and servants; liberality toward friends, acquaintances, and relatives; moderation in expenditure and possessions; and guarding one's speech. While much of this may have been part of a common pool of ethical ideas circulating at the time, the king's insistence on courtesy toward slaves and servants must have had an astonishingly radical ring in the hierarchical society of third-century BCE India. And in such a society, the sight or even the news that the king was constantly moving out of his palace and mingling with the masses must have created amazement. But the most amazing news of all must have been the king's repeated announcements, enunciated through the oral and written word, that everyone, whether

high or low, could attain heaven by following dhamma. Although the Buddha and Mahavira had said this sort of thing earlier, this was the first (and the last) time that an emperor was making such announcements. Ashoka was a political prophet of soteriological socialism.

Nonviolence (*avihiṁsā, anālambhā*) toward all living beings was a central aspect of Ashoka's dhamma. Interestingly, animals are singled out for special mention in this regard. Major rock edict 1 talks about the killing of animals in three contexts—in sacrificial rituals, popular festivals, and the royal kitchen. Hinting at some opposition to the king's attempts to impose vegetarianism in the royal household, it tells us that at the time when the inscription was written, only three animals were being killed in the royal kitchen—two peacocks and a deer, and the deer not regularly. The edict ends with the emperor expressing his hope that even these three animals would not be killed in future. The emphasis on nonviolence was accompanied by the advocacy of a positive attitude of caring. Ashoka asserts that the appropriate conduct toward all living beings includes gentleness (*sayama*) and compassion (*dayā*).[80] Nonviolence was transformed into a central positive principle of personal conduct and the emperor's political agenda.

But why should a person follow dhamma, and why should the state promote it? The answer lies in the ideas of merit (*puṇya*) and demerit (*apuṇya*), mentioned frequently in Ashoka's edicts. Because of the law of karma (not specifically mentioned, but definitely implied), following dhamma leads to the accumulation of merit, beneficial results in the next life, and the attainment of heaven. Not following it means falling prey to grave danger, sins,[81] and demerit. It is presumed that individuals desire to achieve heaven and happiness in the next life. This can be done by governing the self—that is, by cultivating a certain kind of character and positive dispositions—and by engaging in actions arising from these, thereby accumulating merit. The king has an obligation to help his subjects—actually all beings—achieve these goals. It is a debt he owes them.[82] So goodness is not only the concern of an individual, but also a concern of the state.

Ashoka's dhamma was rooted in his personal faith in the Buddha's teaching. There is an overlap between the tenets of the edicts and the dhamma prescribed for the laity in Buddhist texts. Nonviolence, which was an important part of the ethical code prescribed by the king, was also important in Buddhism. But while the Buddhist inspiration cannot

be denied, the range of Ashoka's dhamma injunctions is not identical to the prescriptions for the laity in Buddhist texts, nor is it exclusive to the Buddhist tradition.[83] The key metaphysical ideas underlying Ashoka's politico-moral discourse (rebirth, karma, merit, heaven) and an emphasis on social ethics cut across sectarian and religious lines. Resonances can just as easily be seen with the Jaina tradition. The fact that Ashoka himself did not consider dhamma to be exclusively connected with a particular sect is clear from his statement that all sects (*pāsaṇḍas*) have in common an emphasis on self-control and purity of mind (rock edict 7). This idea is taken further in rock edict 12, where the king expresses his desire that there should be a growth of the essentials (*sāra-vaḍhī*) of all sects and that an atmosphere of concord (*samavāya*) should prevail. This cannot be described as a narrow "religious tolerance." It was an earnest plea for positive and open-minded religious dialogue and concord.

While the cultivation of virtues and self-control are emphasized in many early Indian traditions, Ashoka made governance of the self the cornerstone of his political philosophy. Although Buddhist legend heralds him as a paradigmatic Buddhist king, his inscriptions tell a more complex story. He did not seek to create a Buddhist state but a dhammic, moral, one. And yet, as we shall see, even in this moral state, ethical principles could not be implemented in an absolute form; they had to be tempered by political pragmatism. This applied to political violence as well. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, Ashoka renounced warfare after the Kalinga war, but this did not rule out the use of force against recalcitrant people who lived on the borders or in the forests.

Although his edicts do not clearly distinguish between the administrative and dhammic domains, in several places, we see Ashoka grappling with the practical problems of governing a vast, variegated empire. Addressed to high-ranking officials, the separate rock edicts at Dhauli and Jaudgada in eastern India and Sannati in the south provide the clearest statement of Ashoka's view of the chief problems that lay in the way of good governance, and also the solutions.[84] Separate rock edict 1 deals mainly with justice and prisoners. Separate rock edict 2 talks about the need to instill confidence among the unsubdued borderers, pointing to the problem of incomplete pacification and consolidation. In these inscriptions, the king speaks of various means he had adopted to spread dhamma and asserts that instruction was the principal one, although he recognizes the gap between instruction and implementation. The exhortations and warnings to his officers urging self-regulation are accompanied by a pragmatic deterrent—quinquennial and triennial surveillance tours by the king and the provincial governors.

In rock edict 13, Ashoka urges his sons and grandsons to aim at victory through dhamma (*dhamma-vijaya*) rather than military victory (this edict will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4) and to take pleasure in exertion and hard work. If they could not abjure war completely, he urges them to be merciful and moderate in their use of force or punishment. Here, Ashoka establishes a connection between punishment and war, both of which involved political violence, one internal, the other external.

The numerous references to prisoners in Ashoka's edicts draw attention to the existence of the institution of the prison, probably a recent invention. Rock edict 5 expresses concern for the welfare of prisoners and speaks of the dhamma officers distributing money to prisoners who had children, and releasing those who were aged or had committed crimes due to being misled. Pillar edict 5, which for the most part deals with animals and lays down injunctions against the injuring and killing of certain animals at certain specified times, ends with a statement that the king had ordered the release of prisoners (*bandhana-mokha*) every year until the twenty-sixth anniversary of his consecration. The implication is that imprisonment and its attendant curtailment of freedom involved cruelty to human beings, and that

this type of cruelty could be mitigated by ordering a periodic release of prisoners. Such releases, in fact, seem to have been a part of the model of benevolent kingship in ancient India.

Ashoka's inscriptions also dwell on the problem of unjust punishment. Separate rock edict 1, addressed to city officers known as the *nagalaviyohālakas,* refers to people suffering as a result of unfair imprisonment (*bandhana*) and harsh treatment and exhorts officials to deal with all such cases with fairness and impartiality. Justice is discussed in greater detail in pillar edict 4, which concerns the duties of officers known as the *rājūkas*. The main point emphasized in this edict is that the *rājūkas* should discharge their duties vis-à-vis the handing out of rewards and punishment fairly and fearlessly, and that they should ensure impartiality (*samatā*) in judicial proceedings and punishment. It should be noted that justice and impartiality are important aspects of the idea of the righteous king (*dhammiko dhammarāja*) in early Buddhism.[85]

The assertion that the king has entrusted the people *directly* to the care of the *rājūkas* may be an allusion to certain intermediary officials having been removed. Ashoka exhorts the *rājūkas* to understand what causes the people pleasure and pain, and instructs them to be just in meting out punishment and to do their job fearlessly, confidently, and well. This could imply either that judicial officers were subject to pressures of various kinds, or that there was a problem because of the conflict between nonviolence (a tenet of dhamma) and the fact that they were on occasion required to inflict violence in the administration of justice. The king also orders the *rājūkas* to obey officials known as the *pulisāni,* who were evidently keeping an eye on them. The analogy used for the *rājūkas* in this edict is that of an experienced wetnurse (*dhāti*), one associated with affectionate feminine care and nourishing, which complements the paternalistic sentiment expressed by the king in other inscriptions. In fact, the *rājūkas* and the king are described as having the same goal—to ensure the welfare and happiness of the people entrusted to their care in this world and the next.

For a king obsessed with nonviolence, the discussion of the most extreme kind of punishment—the death sentence—raises some expectations that are swiftly belied. In pillar edict 4, Ashoka says:

My order goes so far as to grant a three-day respite to prisoners

> who have been convicted and sentenced to death. During this period, their relatives can plead for their life to the officers. Or, if there is none to make the plea for them, they [the prisoners condemned to die] can bestow gifts or undertake fasts to secure their happiness in the next world. For it is my desire that even when their time is over, they should attain happiness in the next world and that the various practices of dhamma such as self-control and the distribution of gifts, should be promoted among the people.

The three-day respite has been often cited by historians as an indication that Ashoka did not abolish the death penalty and that there were, therefore, serious limits to his commitment to nonviolence.[86] Apart from enabling the convict to undertake last-minute measures to try to attain happiness in the next world, the edict suggests a context in which execution swiftly followed sentencing and in which even a three-day reprieve was a significant concession. In effect, Ashoka sought to temper the violence inherent in capital punishment in three ways: by exhorting judicial officers to be fair; by ensuring that there should be time and opportunity for a last appeal before the execution of the sentence; and if this appeal failed, by granting the condemned man an opportunity to prepare for his next life.

The *nature* of the laws does not form part of this discussion of justice; the focus is on fairness and moderation in the application and execution of the laws. There is a recognition of flaws in the justice delivery system and the announcement of the introduction of certain ameliorative measures. The king projects himself as a maintainer of justice and simultaneously distances himself from the inevitable instances of injustice, for which the responsibility is placed squarely on his officials.

At the end of the day, Ashoka essentially saw both the problems of governance as well as their solution primarily in psychological terms. Officials were urged to convince the people of his paternalistic benevolence (“all men are my children”) and that the king loved them like himself; that they should not fear him; that they should have confidence in him; that they should expect happiness and not misery from him; that they should practice dhamma; and that by doing so, they would attain happiness in this world and the next. Reassurance is

tempered with firmness in the king's reference (in the second separate rock edict) to his will and unshakeable resolution and his warning to the borderers that the king will forgive that which can be forgiven (similar to his warning to the forest people in rock edict 13). And yet, although Ashoka saw the problem of political consolidation and its solution primarily in psychological terms, at the same time, he pragmatically put in place a surveillance machinery to ensure compliance, and had no hesitation in threatening to use force against those who did not fall in line.

Asoka's dhamma was a new idiosyncratic synthesis that was rooted in the king's personal faith in Buddhism but bore the strong stamp of his own reflections on the fundamental goals of life and power. Metaphysics, ethics, and politics were combined in a unique way, and the resulting synthesis was propagated through a single-minded, zealous, and elaborately organized propaganda campaign. Ashoka's was a radical and audacious aim—the moral transformation of all humankind.

Looking at Ashoka in the context of near contemporary Achaemenid and Macedonian kings, we see some similarities but much difference. The Achaemenid king Darius had multilingual inscriptions couched in the first person inscribed on rocks. These inscriptions project him as a great king, proud of his lineage, who had received kingship from the great god Ahuramazda. He is a paramount ruler over people of many lands, to whom many kings render tribute. He is virtuous, self-controlled, righteous, benevolent, a maintainer of order, a great builder, a bestower of justice and peace, and an enemy of false beliefs.[87] He demands obedience to his law, and *dāta,* the word used for this law in his Aramaic inscriptions, is one of the words used in place of dhamma in the Aramaic edicts of Ashoka (the other one is *qšṭ*). But Darius also boasts of his military prowess and skill. He proudly details his crushing and killing of numerous rebels, describes his many military conquests, and mentions taking many prisoners of war. The relief on the Behistan rock portrays Darius with his foot planted on the prostrate rebel Gaumata as Ahuramazda looks on. Also part of the scene are captive rebels, their hands tied behind their backs and ropes around their neck. The conception of kingship conveyed through these words and images are strikingly different from Ashoka's.

The interests and ambitions of the Macedonian king Alexander also seem to have had little in common with those of Ashoka. Alexander's indefatigable desire for conquest swiftly became legendary. Less known are his extraordinary "last plans," recounted by Diodorus,[88] a wish-list that the Macedonian Assembly immediately annulled on the ground that it was too ambitious and impractical. These plans included the assembling of one thousand warships for a campaign against Carthage and the western Mediterranean; the building of a

road for military purposes across north Africa; the construction of a series of harbors and arsenals; the completion of the pyre raised for Alexander's friend Hephaestion; the building of six huge temples in Greece and Macedonia; and making a magnificent tomb for his father, Philip, which would outshine the pyramid of Gizeh. The most ambitious item on the list was the founding of new cities and the exchange and transplanting of populations between Europe and Asia. So Ashoka was not the only ancient king who had wild or grandiose ideas. But his ambitions were very different from those of his near contemporaries. In his ostentatious rejection of war and his vigorous attempts to inculcate a universal culture of piety, Ashoka appears a misfit in the ancient world.

What about his place in the long-term Indian tradition? Although Ashoka certainly stands apart in the candid confessional style he chose for his edicts, his obsession with explaining and propagating dhamma, and his rejection of war, in several respects he represents the starting point of mainstream classical Indian political thought. He plucked dhamma or dharma out of religious discourse and made it a central political and social issue. He made a bold attempt to assert and emphasize the moral foundations of royal authority and empire, connecting it with the good, happiness, and heaven. He posited a close connection between the governance of the state and the self. And he seriously engaged with the problem of violence and conflict in the political and social spheres, presenting the state as a primary mediator.

In doing all this, Ashoka may have played a decisive role in changing the connotations of that all-important word, "dharma." Patrick Olivelle has suggested that the Buddha took over the concept of dharma with its strong royal associations (along with other royal symbols) from the Brahmanical tradition and gave it new ethical content, also using it to refer to his doctrine. Then, Ashoka came along and talked extensively about dhamma in his edicts. It was his appropriation of the word and his injection of new ethical content into it that transformed it into a central cultural concept, which the Brahmanas were forced to take note of by inventing the disciple of Dharmashastra.[89] For the Buddhists, dhamma stood for the word and the teaching of the Buddha, who was its authoritative source. The Brahmanas had to scramble about and come up with their own version of dharma and to identify its source. They did this by creating an enormous authoritative corpus of texts that dealt specifically with

the subject—Dharmashastra.

Compelling as this hypothesis is, it depends to a great extent on the chronology of individuals, events, and texts. If the Buddha is placed in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE and if the composition of the earliest Dharmashastra texts also goes back to this period, and Ashoka appears on the scene afterward, the hypothesis collapses. However, there is no doubt that in the long run, the "classical" Indian understanding of dharma emerged out of an intense cultural conversation between different religious, philosophical, and intellectual traditions. As an influential participant in this conversation, Ashoka played a significant role in the evolution of the idea, especially through his public propagation of the idea of a strong connection between kingship, the soteriological goals of the individual, and social ethics.

Ashoka can also be seen as foundational with respect to ancient Indian royal religious policy. He recognized the problem of sectarian conflict and dealt with it through exhortation and action, projecting himself as a king who stood above sectarian distinctions. Although an ardent Buddhist, he urged respect for various sects, as well as for Brahmanas and renunciants. He enlarged the stupa of a Buddha named Kanakamuni, and after visiting Lumbini, he declared certain tax exemptions for its inhabitants. But he also granted a cave in the Barabar hills to the Ajivika ascetics. His religious patronage was multidirectional and not constrained by his personal religious beliefs, and women of the royal household had the freedom and authority to make pious gifts. In all these respects, Ashoka's political thought and practice can be seen as foundational to the Indian political tradition. But his denunciation and renunciation of war and his massive piety propaganda campaign were radical by the standards of not only his, but any, age.

Kingship in the Sanskrit Epics: The *Mahabharata*

Dharma and kingship swiftly became topics of earnest and intense discussion and debate in ancient Indian texts, including the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The *Mahabharata* is traditionally attributed to Vyasa and the *Ramayana* to Valmiki. The epics are many things. They are dramatic stories, powerful purveyors of religious ideas and social values, and highly influential political texts. Political conflicts among kin are common to both. The plot in both involves a violation and restitution of the principle of primogeniture, but in strikingly different ways—in the *Mahabharata* through a violent fratricidal war, and in the *Ramayana* through a model of filial and fraternal obedience. The epics evolved over several centuries, probably between circa 400 BCE and 400 CE.[90] Many scholars see them as heroic tales composed by bards, which at some point passed into the hands of Brahmanas. But the reverse has also been suggested; according to Alf Hiltebeitel, the *Mahabharata* was composed from the start as a written text by "out-of-sorts" Brahmanas, and later passed into the hands of bards.[91]

The narrative and didactic elements in the epics are closely interwoven. The didactic statements, especially those on dharma, are highly contextual. So we have to take into account not only what is said, but also the narrative frame, who is talking to whom, and when. The two texts are aware of each other's stories, and boons, curses, vows, karma, and dharma are features of both. Both contain an interweaving of heroic and religious elements. Both claim that reading or hearing them has the potential of conferring great material and spiritual benefit. Over the centuries, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* lent themselves to a vast number of remoldings and retellings that existed in multiple forms—oral, written, and performative; they traveled far beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the subcontinent, extending into various parts of Southeast Asia; and their influence stretches from ancient times down to the present.

The heroes of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* belong respectively to the two great legendary royal lineages of ancient India—the solar and the lunar lineages, known as the Suryavamsha and Chandravamsha. In the totalizing dynastic theory of the epics and Puranas, all kings are ultimately descendants of the mythical Manu

Vaivasvata. Manu is said to have had nine sons and a daughter, Ilā (or a son, Ila, who was transformed into a woman, Ilā). The descendants of Manu's son Ikshvaku constituted the solar lineage (Rama and his family belonged to this lineage) and the descendants of Ilā's son Pururavas constituted the lunar lineage (the Kurus belonged to this lineage). Time is visualized as cyclical, each cycle (*mahāyuga*) consisting of a succession of four ages, or *yugas*—Krita, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali—marked by a systematic decline in dharma, leading to the ultimate dissolution and recreation of the world.

Although they have a specific historical setting, the epics also possess a certain universality. They are stories about human relationships, primarily those associated with kinship. They invoke and evoke the deepest human experiences and emotions—love, friendship, anger, ambition, jealousy, and grief. Historically, they have also functioned as powerful political texts, dealing with perennial issues of authority, entitlement, conflict, war, and violence. It is this universality that made it possible for the epics to settle into very diverse cultural niches and has given them their enormous appeal in South and Southeast Asia.

The *Mahabharata,* a voluminous, encyclopedic, and complex text, consisting of over 100,000 verses, abounds in ambiguities and contradictions. The central story is set in the Kuru kingdom, located in the Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Ganga valley with its capital at Hastinapura. It revolves around a dispute over their patrimony between two sets of cousins, the five Pandava brothers and the hundred Kaurava brothers. After losing in a gambling match, the Pandavas face exile for twelve years in the forest followed by one year which they have to spend incognito. Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, refuses to give the Pandavas their share of the kingdom and the conflict spirals into a terrible war between the cousins and their allies. The Pandavas ultimately win, and the eldest, Yudhisththira, becomes king. The *Mahabharata* deals extensively with dharma and kingship; it discusses violence and war with unprecedented directness and detail from multiple perspectives, blending old values with new doubt and questioning.

The *Mahabharata* is both a foundational text and a transitional one. It oscillates between two religious worlds—that of Vedic gods and the new supreme gods, Vishnu and Shiva. Although it describes itself as the fifth Veda, it reflects new cultural and religious values, which were to be developed further in the Puranas. Performing sacrifices was still important, but a new idea of an intimate god–human relationship based on devotion (*bhakti*) was taking shape.[92] Heaven was still a coveted goal, but it seems inferior to practicing the great yoga of final release, through which one can know the ultimate reality, *brahman.*

At the core of the *Mahabharata* are issues related to kingship, the Kshatriya warrior class, and the relationship between Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. The text connects an old-world warrior ethic with new political concerns related to empire and governance, and adds new religious elements to them. It combines a belief in the decrees of fate (*daiva*) with an assertion that human effort (*utthāna, pauruṣa*) is not only important but essential. The fact that war and its consequences have to be reflected on and debated indicates that the time of the warrior who fought valiantly and unquestioningly unto death had passed.

The strong dialogic element in the text was ideal for conducting debates on politics, life, death, heaven, merit, release, and many other

aspects of the human condition. The epic recognizes that the problems of power and violence demand pragmatic as well as philosophical and moral answers. The *Mahabharata* does not always give one answer to a question; it gives several alternatives. There is a lack of certainty in the minds of the major characters when they are faced with dilemmas, and they often make their decisions after agonizing deliberations with others. Are complex issues resolved? To some extent they are, in the choices that the characters eventually make, in what they actually do, and in the outcome of their actions and decisions. And in a sense, they are not resolved, and cannot be, because, as the epic never tires of telling us, dharma is mysterious (*guhya*) and subtle (*sūkṣma*); there are no quick or easy resolutions or solutions to the most fundamental problems of human existence. In its discussion of serious moral dilemmas within its narrative frame, the *Mahabharata* contains a rich discourse on moral philosophy.[93]

The political landscape of the epic has many kingdoms and tribal oligarchies (*gaṇas*), but the predominant focus is on monarchical states. Kingship is not always simply inherited; it can be contested and lost; it has to be fought for and reclaimed through prowess, strategy, and violence. Kinglessness is equated with anarchy. The similes used to describe a kingless state include metaphors involving eating. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira,

> "Should there be no king in the world, no one to wield the royal rod of force upon the earth, then the stronger would roast the weaker on spits, like fish. We have learned that peoples without kings have vanished in the past, devouring each other, the way fishes in the water eat the smaller ones."[94]

A land without a king is weak; it is overrun by barbarians (*dasyus*); the social order of the *varṇas* is overturned; free men are enslaved; livelihoods perish, and there is famine; life is unsafe because theft, plunder, and rape are rampant; there are no sacrifices or Vedic study. If there were no kings, humankind would perish and the world would descend into hell.[95] The king is necessary to prevent social violence and anarchy.

In the *Mahabharata,* there are kings and paramount kings. The epic contains a great deal of discussion of statecraft and is replete with an elaborate political vocabulary, which is also found in the *Arthashastra*

(this will be discussed in the next chapter), with which the epics overlapped chronologically. These discussions are especially concentrated in Books 12 and 13—the Shanti Parva (The book of peace) and Anushasana Parva (The book of discipline)—which contain a long, rambling conversation between Yudhishthira and his grand-uncle, the great warrior Bhishma, conducted on the battlefield while the latter lies dying on a bed of arrows.[96] There is mention of the seven-limbed kingdom (*saptāṅga-rājya, sapta-prakṛti*) as well as of the eight-limbed state, whose eighth limb is not specified.[97] The kingdom is a mighty organization and cannot be ruled by one man alone; a king needs good retainers and officials. Ministers, officials, and courtiers must possess certain qualities and should be frequently subjected to tests of loyalty. Kinsmen are a source of strength as well as danger. The king must zealously protect himself and the other elements of the state, and must strike a balance between suspicion and trust. There are many references to spies. Good policy (*naya*) is distinguished from bad policy (*apanaya*). The king must use the four expedients (*upāyas*)—namely, conciliation (*sāma*), gifts (*dāna*), force (*daṇḍa*), and creating dissension (*bheda*)—and should adopt the flexible policy of reeds (*vaitasī-vṛtti*). The *Mahabharata* also talks about the six measures of interstate policy—namely, peace or making a treaty (*sandhi*), war (*vigraha*), staying quiet (*āsana*), marching (*yāna*), seeking shelter (*saṁśraya*), and the dual policy (*dvaidhibhāva*) of simultaneously pursuing peace with one ruler and waging war against another. While political paramountcy is an important concern in the *Mahabharata,* the term *cakravartin* occurs only eleven times in the voluminous work.[98]

The epic is not concerned with the nitty-gritty of administration. Its main focus is on kings, their kin, members of the royal household, allies, and enemies. Noble birth and lineage are central, and there is much recounting of the history of royal lineages. Like the *Ramayana,* the *Mahabharata* emphasizes that primogeniture is an inviolable right. Yudhishthira is the rightful king because he is the eldest. This emphasis may reflect a historical situation in which this right was, in fact, not always acknowledged or implemented. The text makes a pitch for the unification of diverse scattered Kshatriya lineages and for the restoration of a unified hereditary warrior class, but within a hierarchical framework of one paramount ruler lording it over many subordinate kings. The Mahabharata war has to be fought so that the eldest prince, Yudhishthira, can become king. But it has to be a war involving *all* kings, in order to leave one unquestioned paramount

king.

The Pandavas' claim to their fair share of the kingdom is not an ordinary scramble for power; it is part of a larger cosmic endgame. It is necessary for the creation of a new, righteous world order from the annihilation of an older one.[99] We are told that after the Brahmana Parashurama had wiped out all the Kshatriyas, not once but twenty-one times, Kshatriya women approached ascetic Brahmanas to produce offspring, and a new breed of Kshatriyas was born from this Kshatriya–Brahmana union. Kshatriya rule was restored on earth, and the social order of the four *varṇas* was also restored. But demons, deprived of their sovereignty by the numerous defeats they had suffered at the hands of the gods, took birth in increasing numbers on earth as humans and animals. Some of them were born as kings who oppressed their realms in innumerable ways. The earth beseeched the god Brahma for succor, and he ordered all the other gods and celestial beings (the *gandharvas* and *apsarases*) to use portions of themselves and take birth on earth. The Pandavas and certain other characters of the epic took birth as partial incarnations of various deities. The Kaurava prince Duryodhana, on the other hand, was born from the evil Kali (a personification of the evil fourth age, Kali); his brothers were all demons (*rākṣasas*), born among men. Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas, was an incarnation of Shri, the goddess of sovereignty. So the cataclysmic political conflict of the *Mahabharata* is actually part of the age-old gods-versus-demons conflict. But although this epic (like many other Brahmanical texts) exalts kings as gods on earth, it also deals extensively with very real problems of kingship, especially the problem of violence.

Apart from being a story of kings, the *Mahabharata* theorizes a great deal about the institution of kingship. The Shanti Parva offers two accounts of the origins of kingship. The first account begins in the age of perfection, the Krita age, when there was no king, no government, and no punishment because they were not required; everyone guarded each other in accordance with dharma.[100] But men fell prey to error and confusion, and this led to greed and desire, and a decline in dharma. The performance of the sacred sacrificial rites waned, and the Veda disappeared. Alarmed by this, the gods approached Brahma, who composed a treatise in a hundred thousand lessons on dharma, *artha,* and *kāma,* which dealt with everything, including the various aspects of statecraft (*nītiśāstra*). Realizing that the text was rather vast and human life short, the work was systematically abridged by the god Shiva and then by the sages Brihaspati and Kavya, the preceptors of the gods and demons respectively.

However the problem of extreme social disorder required something more than a good book. It required a pragmatic institutional solution. So the gods approached Vishnu, asking him who should rule over humans. Vishnu produced a mind-born son Virajas, who was followed by his son and grandson. But these three did not want to rule. Ananga was next in line and ruled well; he was followed by his son Atibala who was unfortunately addicted to vices. Then came Vena, enslaved to sensual pleasure, who did not discharge his duties properly. The sages killed Vena (rather dramatically) by stabbing him with blades of sacred *kusha* grass. Then they churned his right thigh, out of which emerged an ugly man named Nishada, who was told to make himself scarce because the sages did not think him suitable material for a king. Then they churned Vena's right hand,

> and from that came a man who looked like another Indra. He wore armor, had a sword strapped on, and had a bow and arrows. He knew the Vedas and their auxiliary texts, and was a master of the Veda of the Bow. The entire policy of administering the rod of force [*daṇḍanīti*] had lodged in this best of men.[101]

He had a mind that understood dharma and *artha* and he sought the

advice and guidance of the gods and the sages. This man is not named, but from references elsewhere in the epic, we know him to be Prithu. Vishnu entered this man and decreed that no one would surpass him. Gods and sages instructed him, and he was consecrated king. Endowed with excellent qualities, Prithu ruled well.

While the gods and sages play important roles in this story, it is the gods and people who play important parts in the second account of the origin of kingship in the Shanti Parva.[102] In order to deal with social anarchy, violence, and insecurity, the people came together and made agreements (*samayāḥ*) among themselves. They agreed to get rid of violent, aggressive men who stole, violated women, and performed other such evil acts. However, they were unsuccessful in doing this. So, in great torment, they went to Brahma and begged him to appoint a king who could protect them and whom they would honor in return. Brahma chose Manu, but Manu did not take up the task immediately. His reasons are interesting:

> "I am afraid of cruel [*krūra*] acts. For kingship is an extremely difficult task, especially among men, who are always prone to wrongful behaviour."[103]

The people urged Manu not to be afraid and reassured him that the sin incurred by his cruel deeds would go away. They also made him an attractive offer—they would give him one-fiftieth of their cattle and gold, and one-tenth of their grain; soldiers skilled in war would follow him everywhere; and one-fourth of the merit earned by the people would go to him (there is no reference to their demerit rubbing off on him). Manu accepted this contractual arrangement and proceeded to go around the earth, suppressing the wicked and making them perform their duties.

In the first Shanti Parva story, there are three kinds of kings—those who do not want to rule; those who indulge in sensual pleasures and rule badly; and good kings who rule well. It is significant that the Nishada, who represents the forest people, although summarily dismissed, is an integral part of the account. The second story has a reluctant king who is afraid of the violence inherent in kingship, and whose reluctance to rule is overcome through a social contract between the king and his subjects. When compared with the Buddhist accounts of the origins of kingship, there are a few similarities and

several differences. In both cases, there is the idea of a fall from a primordial age of perfection, a contractual idea of kingship, and an emphasis on the king as a punisher and maintainer of the social order. But Buddhist texts emphasize the centrality of the Buddha's dhamma, righteous and extensive victories, and the wheel, while the *Mahabharata* emphasizes the role of the gods and sages. The political vocabulary of the *Mahabharata* is also far more elaborate and sophisticated than that of the early Buddhist texts, and its engagement with the problem of political violence is much more detailed and direct.

Dharma and Doubt

Dharma is many things in the *Mahabharata.* He is a god, who subjects his son Yudhishthira to several tests. Dharma as righteousness is what distinguishes humans from animals; it is a way of living and doing; it is one and many. The epic makes a powerful attempt to relate kingship with a morality and duty that is peculiar to the political sphere—*rāja-dharma* (the dharma of the king). The *Mahabharata* abounds in discussions of dharma, and comments frequently on its subtlety. However, the overall emphasis of the narrative is that one must understand one's dharma—essentially that of the *varṇa* that one is born into—and strive to follow it, no matter how unpleasant it may be and how much unhappiness it may bring. The sources of dharma include the Vedas, perception, and the conduct of wise men. Apart from the fact that it makes for order and stability in society, the cost-benefit analysis for the individual is clear and simple: Following dharma leads to heaven; not following it leads to hell. The *Mahabharata* talks about and affirms the importance of dharma from the vantage point of a perception of its decline. This is not surprising, because the events of the epic straddle the last two of the four world ages, Dvapara and Kali, when dharma stands on two feet and then one, moving toward its nadir before the cyclical dissolution and recreation of the world. Dharma is connected with truth (*satya*), not so much in its conventional sense as in the more important sense that the significant spoken word—such as the vow, curse, or oath—must come to pass, an idea that is also connected with fate.

The problem is that dharma is not always self-evident. The two principal exponents of dharma in the epic are Bhishma and Krishna. The Shanti and Anushasana Parvas contain Bhishma's very long death-bed orations on dharma to Yudhisthira. Krishna delivers a philosophically rich sermon (the *Bhagavadgita*) on the dharma of a warrior to Arjuna on the eve of the war, and holds forth on dharma at various other points as well. But while most of the dharma experts are men and women belonging to the circle of sages and royalty, there are others—for instance, a merchant, a hunter, and a snake. It is ironic that in spite of the presence of so many experts, there is constant debate on the subject, and dharma is frequently ignored and transgressed, especially during the war.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the *Mahabharata*'s discussion

of dharma is its demonstration that there are several dharmas. Dharma (used in the singular and the plural) is often said to be eternal and universal, but we are told that the dharmas of different ages vary. There is also the idea of *āpad-dharma,* dharma in time of emergency, when all kinds of departures from the norm are justified. As many as thirty-nine chapters of the *Mahabharata* are devoted to this subject,[104] and it is mentioned elsewhere as well. Bhishma emphasizes the importance of good judgment as the basis of legitimate departures from the norm. In extreme circumstances, even radical departures are justified. For instance, the sage Vishvamitra is said to have committed no wrong when, starving in a time of famine, he stole and ate some dog's meat from the house of an untouchable Chandala, disregarding the latter's horrified remonstrations.[105]

Dharma is frequently associated with the *varṇa*s and the *āśrama*s, but there is also a dharma of sages, of forest people, even of *mlecchas*. *Mleccha* is a catch-all term that includes tribal groups and foreigners and is often loosely translated as "barbarian." But it should be noted that there was considerable flexibility in the concept; attitudes toward these people ranged from condescension and marginalization to accommodation and assimilation.[106] Apart from the dharma applicable to the four *varṇa*s and to specific sorts of people, there is a dharma that applies to all, known as *sāmānya dharma,* or *sādhāraṇa dharma.* This includes virtues such as not getting angry, truthfulness, sharing, forbearance, begetting children on one's wife, cleanliness, freedom from malice, rectitude, supporting one's dependents, honoring guests, and performing the *śrāddha* ceremonies for the ancestors. Self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*), nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*), and compassion (*ānṛśaṁsya*) also figure in the list.[107] But this dharma applicable to all is not as important as the dharma of the *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s.

While the *Mahabharata* frequently emphasizes that dharma consists in following the duties of one's *varṇa,* it also asserts on several occasions that the highest dharma consists of nonviolence (this will be discussed farther on) or in controlling the senses and focusing the mind. Toward the end of the Shanti Parva, the *uñcha* vow is described as the highest dharma. This consists of living a life of extreme frugality, on food acquired through gleaning, that is, gathering grain. The explanation of these apparent contradictions is the fact that the epic offers two alternative models of life—one engaged with the world, the other detached from it. Although it repeatedly emphasizes

the importance of performing one's *varṇa-dharma,* it frequently talks about the dharma of liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa-dharma*), which requires true knowledge, control of the senses, and complete detachment.

Along with seemingly endless ruminations on dharma come powerful critiques, which highlight the fact that following dharma may lead to suffering, unhappiness, even death. As the wheel of his chariot sinks into the ground at a critical point in the battle, Karna (the Pandavas' brother, born to Kunti out of wedlock and reared by a charioteer and his wife), who fights on the Kaurava side, rails in anguish against dharma:

> "Dharma experts have proclaimed that dharma always protects those who honor it. But my low dharma is not protecting me today, in spite of my devotion to it."[108]

The king's dharma is rooted in his *varṇa-dharma,* that is, in the dharma of the Kshatriya warrior. But while there are some overlaps (for instance, both require protecting the people), the former includes many additional elements. In the events leading up to the war and during the war itself, it is the dharma of the warrior that predominates in the *Mahabharata.* Toward the latter part of the war and after it is over, the focus shifts to the dharma of the king. When Bhishma delivers his discourse on kingship to Yudhishthira while lying on a bed of arrows at Kurukshetra, that battlefield is converted into a classroom where wisdom about a king's dharma is imparted. The fact that this lecture occurs in the Shanti Parva (The book of peace) suggests a connection between peace and the art of ruling.[109] The king is described as the chief protector, maintainer, and exemplar of dharma. The dharma (the plural form of the word is also sometimes used) of the king is the most important of all dharmas, because it is their basis; it is necessary for the fulfilment of the goals of human existence (dharma, or righteousness; *artha,* or material gain; and *kāma,* or sensual pleasure) and for the maintenance of order and stability in the world. So the dharma of kings encompasses all other dharmas just as an elephant's footprint engulfs the footprints of all other creatures.[110]

Yudhishthira personifies an important concern of the *Mahabharata* —to ground kingship in dharma—in a very literal way. He is Dharmaraja (the king of dharma), the son of the god Dharma, and the king who, after the war, inherits and rules the unified Kuru realm. He successfully goes through three rounds of dharma tests (administered by his father, the god Dharma), and at the end of the epic, is lauded for this adherence to dharma. His major lapse is the deceit he practiced in order to kill his teacher, the great warrior Drona, and the epic presents his act as a transgression.[111] Yudhishthira's connection with dharma is rather complex. He is not an exemplary knower or practitioner of dharma, but rather one who is racked with doubt about it. In fact, he seems to have more uncertainties than any other character about what his dharma is, and he rails against it on several occasions. But he is also a key interlocutor whose questions about dharma and kingship are especially important because he is the would-be king who eventually becomes king. It is Yudhishthira's

dilemmas and questions that allow other people—especially Bhishma—to explain the king's dharma.

Bhishma explains the qualities and duties of the ideal king through the use of vivid similes. These include a very detailed analogy between the king and a peacock, which begins as follows:

> "Just as a peacock's tail has feathers of many colours, so should a king who knows the Laws [*dharmavit*] display many forms—sharpness, deviousness, indomitability, truthfulness, and rectitude; standing in the middle of all of them, relying upon his mettle, he reaches a comfortable position. He should take whatever coloration would be good for some particular affair. Even his very delicate affairs succeed when a king can take on many different forms."[112]

There are other interesting analogies. The king should be like a pregnant woman who forsakes her lover and devotes herself to the care of her child.[113] His job is like that of a washerman (*rajaka*)—both have to remove blemishes, the king from his kingdom and the washerman from clothes.[114] The qualities of the ideal king include being true to his word (*satya*), rectitude (*ārjava*), and willingness to make sacrifices for others (*tyāga*). He should honor and protect Brahmanas, perform sacrifices, and proffer gifts. He should possess the qualities of kindness and compassion (*ānṛśaṁsya, dayā, anukampā, anukrośa*) toward all creatures. Toward the end of the *Mahabharata* saga, Yudhishthira's feelings of kindness and compassion (*ānṛśaṁsya*) are reflected and emphasized in his refusing to abandon a dog (which is actually the god Dharma in disguise) in order to reach heaven. Perhaps the most important of all royal qualities is *vinaya* (self-control, discipline). There is an important connection between the king's control over himself and the self-control of his officials and subjects. The king must be able to control others, but he can do so only if he can control himself. In fact, Bhishma states that *vinaya* (discipline, self-control) is the greatest principle of kings.[115]

Bhishma's discourse on kingship in the Shanti Parva distinguishes the personal from the political sphere, asserting that the king must be guided by his dharma, and not by his self-interest. The etymology of *rājā* is "one who pleases the subjects" (*rājā rañjayati prajā*).[116] The great king Sagara had banished his own son Asamanjas because the

latter had tormented the townsmen; the king's subjects were dearer to him than his son.[117] The king is the maintainer of dharma. The most important aspect of his own dharma is the protection of the people through dharma and the promotion of dharma, *artha,* and *kāma.* He must guard *varna-dharma, deśa-dharma* (the duties of different countries), and *kula-dharma* (the duties of different clans), thereby preventing the onset of chaos.

The king should have compassion for his subjects, prevent the strong from preying on the weak, and prevent social violence and chaos. Like the spring sun, he should be both gentle (*mṛdu*) and harsh (*tīkṣṇa*), especially in matters related to taxation and punishment. The need for moderation in taxation is brought home through the use of many analogies. The king should be like a bee that sucks the nectar from flowers gradually. Just as a cow whose calf has sucked too much of her milk cannot do much work, similarly, a land that has been over-milked (over-taxed) cannot work. The paternalistic role of the king is frequently mentioned. The best king is one in whose kingdom people move about fearlessly, like children in their father's house. There is also the idea of the king owing a debt (presumably to his subjects). The king's duty to protect sometimes extends beyond his subjects toward all beings (*sarva-bhūtāḥ*).[118]

The king of the *Mahabharata* acquires merit and heaven by protecting his subjects and ensuring their welfare. The transfer mechanism of merit and demerit is described thus: A king who protects his virtuous subjects gains one-fourth of the religious merit earned by them; one who does not protect virtuous subjects incurs their sin (*pāpa*).[119] Those who help the king in protecting his subjects also earn a share in the subjects' merit. Not only is protecting his people a way of attaining merit, it is the most efficacious way—a king gains one hundred times more merit by doing this than by following the sequence of the four stages of life or by living the life of a renunciant in the forest.[120]

In his long lecture on kingship, Bhishma also discusses the administering of punishment (*daṇḍa*).[121] He tells Yudhishthira that the royal rod was created by the god Brahma for the protection of the world in order that people would perform their proper duties. *Daṇḍa* is the origin of kingship, and everything depends on it. Using violent imagery, Bhishma describes it as a terrifying monster with many arms, legs, tusks, and eyes. *Daṇḍa* inspires fear in people, and this fear prevents them from killing one other. The king's punishment is

essential to prevent extreme social violence.

But the king's use of force in punishment must be measured and in accordance with proper judicial principles. Punishments should be systematic and proportionate to the crime; they can include censure, imprisonment, fines, banishment, bodily mutilation, and death, although banishment, corporeal punishment, and death should not be inflicted for minor infringements.[122] If they commit wrong, no one, not even the king's close kin and associates, should be spared from punishment. There is a connection between the king's proper administration of justice and his afterlife. It is a simple one: A just king goes to heaven; an unjust one goes to hell.

In line with the discussion of dharma in times of emergency (*āpad-dharma*), the king is permitted to do use fair or foul means to protect his person, people, and treasury when they are in danger. This includes seizing wealth from others, violence, and killing. Unlike others, who, in time of distress, can adopt the profession of another *varṇa,* the king cannot fall back on another vocation.[123] He has no option but to be king.

Although the good guys ultimately win the war and the kingdom, the *Mahabharata* story is a very unhappy one. There are places where the pursuit of dharma is described as leading to various rewards, including happiness. But the narrative of the epic suggests the precise opposite. There is no happiness in store for the Pandavas, at least not in this life. Arjuna is the archetype of the skillful and dutiful but unhappy warrior. Yudhishthira is the archetype of the dutiful but unhappy king. Dharma seems to be irreconcilable with happiness, but then maybe happiness is an impossible goal.

Although the struggle and desire for kingship underlie its entire narrative, Yudhishthira berates kingship:

> "I have not wanted the pleasures of kingship [*rājya-sukha*]. I have not wanted kingship, even for a second. I accepted kingship for the sake of dharma, but there is no dharma in it. Therefore I have had enough of kingship where there is no dharma. And because of my desire to follow dharma, I will go to the forest. There, in the fresh wilderness, having laid down the rod of force [*daṇḍa*], having attained mastery over my senses, as a sage living on roots and fruits, I will worship dharma."[124]

Yudhishthira's statement that he has not wanted kingship even for an instant is not, strictly speaking, true. What he means is that he did not want kingship out of lust for power or luxuries but because it was his right (according to the rule of primogeniture). The main reason for his balking at being king and frequent threats to go off to the forest is that he recognizes, more than anyone else, the moral problems in the exercise of kingship and is not willing to easily accept instrumentalist reasoning and justification. He sees a conflict between dharma and kingship and is especially troubled by the violence that is inherent in the exercise of power. Yudhishthira ultimately emerges as a good king but not a perfect one; his chief imperfection is his vacillating and indecisive nature.

The epic recognizes that even good men and good kings can fall prey to vices. It speaks of the four royal vices—drinking, gambling, womanizing, and hunting—which were to become topics of discussion and debate in ancient Indian political discourse. None of these

activities was considered inappropriate in moderation; they became matters of concern when they veered into excess and addiction. And when that happened, they were no longer the king's personal problem but a larger political problem that could have drastic consequences for the political system as a whole. Among the royal vices, the *Mahabharata* dwells most of all on gambling, and after that, on hunting. At various places in the epic, Krishna, Vidura, and, ironically, even Yudhishthira, dilate on the evils of gambling. Yudhishthira's addiction to dicing and the fact that he had made a vow never to refuse to play lead directly to the disaster that unfolds. Even though he knows that the Kauravas will use trickery to defeat him in dicing, Yudhishthira wagers and loses all his riches, possessions, city, country, land, brothers, and wife to them. His defeat in the second dicing match leads to the Pandavas' long exile.

Duryodhana, evil and violent from his childhood, is the prime example of a bad man who is so overcome with jealousy and anger, and intoxicated with his own sense of entitlement and power, that he does not heed the repeated counsel of his kin and advisers to make peace with his cousins. He is a villain, even if he occasionally rises to some heights of nobility, especially just before his death. And yet, Duryodhana is not portrayed as a bad *king*. His killing is justified not on the grounds of the nature of his rule, but mainly by the fact that he had refused to give his cousins their fair share of their patrimony.

After the rout of the Kauravas in the war, in Book 9 of the epic, an exhausted and wounded Duryodhana enters a lake and solidifies its waters. He refuses to come out from hiding, even when taunted, though eventually he does emerge to fight Bhima with clubs, a duel in which he is ultimately killed. The hiding in the lake is a curious episode, in which Duryodhana's magical powers are on display.[125] In fact, in its portrayal of the two major protagonists, Duryodhana and Yudhishthira, and the defeat of the former by the latter, the *Mahabharata* announces a significant change in the ideology of kingship. Duryodhana seems to represent an older idea of kingship in which brute force and the magico-religious powers associated with kingship are prominent. Yudhishthira represents a newer idea of kingship, in which politics struggles to come to terms with dharma, with ethics. If Yudhishthira often strikes us as weak and vacillating in his commitment to dharma, it is only if we think of dharma as a clear and absolute norm, which it never was. We get a dramatically different picture of Yudhishthira's commitment to dharma when we

compare him with Duryodhana, who does not seem to be bothered in the least by dharma-related dilemmas. With Yudhishthira, concerns with political ethics are here to stay. But the *Mahabharata* shows us that there can be no perfect king. It presents the many grey areas of political power, in a manner that is quite different from the *Ramayana,* and even more different from the strong idealization of kingship that we see in early Buddhist texts.

The Problem of Violence

The *Mahabharata* is pervaded by relentless violence. Apart from the main war, which is described in gory detail, there are many other battles. After the war, the Yadavas kill each other down to the last man, and even the god Krishna meets a violent death. It is ironic that one of the most violent stories in the ancient world contains a great deal of reflection on the problem of violence and much praise of nonviolence. This seems to have seeped in from the larger cultural milieu in which critiques of violence had made a strong impact. Buddhism and Jainism must have contributed in a major way toward the creation of such a milieu.

The two important words in the epic's treatment of the problem of violence are *ahiṁsā* and *ānṛśaṁsya.* Mukund Lath suggests that *ānṛśaṁsya* was a new word and idea and was much more important in this text than *ahiṁsā.*[126] *Ahiṁsā* (nonviolence) was the ideal for the renunciant, and was impossible to practice in absolute terms while living a worldly life. *Ānṛśaṁsya* (Lath understands it as including goodwill, empathy, and fellow-feeling), on the other hand, was an ethic for worldly life. Both terms are mentioned as the "highest dharma" in the *Mahabharata.* Many other things are also mentioned as the "highest dharma"; these include truth, the Veda, following one's spiritual teacher, honoring guests, and wealth. But, as Hiltebeitel points out, *ānṛśaṁsya* occurs most often, and like *ahiṁsā,* it too is discussed contextually and is not an absolute. It is expandable, emanates from the heart and emotion, and has much more positive connotations than *ahiṁsā.*[127] However, in spite of all this, neither *ahiṁsā* nor *ānṛśaṁsya* constitutes the central message of the epic. To some extent, this is due to its inherently multivocal nature; the *Mahabharata* cannot be reduced to a single, central message. It does not lay down absolutes; instead, it recognizes the tensions between different alternative imperatives and perspectives.

So it should not really come as a surprise that the *Mahabharata* abounds in contradictory statements about violence and nonviolence. As mentioned earlier, nonviolence is part of the dharma for all *varṇa*s and on several occasions is described on as the greatest dharma (*ahiṁsā paramo dharma*ḥ).[128] It is also said to be the highest form of self-control, liberality, austerity, sacrifice, strength, friendship, happiness, and truth.[129] Practicing nonviolence and other virtues leads

to heaven. An ideal Brahmana should not perform violent acts. Compassion and its variants (pity, sympathy, gentleness) are virtues that a king should possess. Yudhishthira, devoted to dharma, is described as ever free from cruelty (*nityamānṛśaṁsya*).[130] The *Bhagavadgita* mentions nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) as part of a list of virtues that comprise knowledge (*jñāna*).[131]

But the epic is quite emphatic in asserting that an excess of a predilection for nonviolence is disastrous for a king. Bhishma warns the vacillating Yudhishthira of too much compassion:

> "Nothing great can be achieved through pure compassion [*ānṛśaṁsya*]. Further, people do not hold you in much respect for being gentle, self-controlled and excessively noble and righteous, a compassionate and righteous eunuch.… The behavior you want to follow is not the behavior of kings."[132]

His message is blunt and simple:

> "Be the king, win heaven, protect the virtuous, kill the wicked."[133]

Further, Bhishma tells Yudhishthira, absolute nonviolence is impossible. Nobody in the world has a livelihood that does not involve doing some amount of violence (*hiṁsā*). Even a sage wandering in the forest commits violence, so what is there to say of the king whose job it is to protect all creatures?[134] The conversation between the Brahmana Kaushika and a hunter is even more instructive. The hunter works in a slaughterhouse and takes the Brahmana home. When the latter criticizes his occupation, the hunter states in a matter-of-fact way that it is his hereditary profession, and therefore his dharma. He also points out philosophically that life inevitably involves killing—even walking on the earth destroys creatures.[135] While his birth as a hunter is ultimately revealed to be the result of wicked deeds performed in a past life, the bottom line is that one does not incur sin by violence that is connected to one's hereditary calling.

As mentioned earlier, one of the accounts of the origin of kingship in the *Mahabharata* has Manu not wanting to be king because of the cruel deeds he would have to perform while discharging his duties.[136]

What was the king to do? Arjuna tells Yudhishthira that the king's force (*daṇḍa*) is necessary for the welfare of the world. In every action, there is both right and wrong. Kings do not attain glory without killing their enemies. All living creatures inflict some kind of harm on other creatures.

> "Beings live upon beings, the stronger upon the weaker. The mongoose eats mice, then the cat eats the mongoose, the dog eats the cat, a wild beast eats the dog, and a man eats all of these.… Everything here mobile and stationary is the food of life."[137]

While the *Mahabharata* from time to time lauds nonviolence as a didactic principle, the main story and the discourses on kingship leave no doubt that the king must not, cannot, practice nonviolence. The dominant view in the epic is that violence that is necessary to the performance of one's hereditary calling, and therefore one's duty, is justified. Absolute nonviolence is absolutely impossible. It is especially impossible for a king.

How can a king with a conscience deal with the inevitability of political violence? Bhishma tells Yudhishthira that a kingdom is the worst scene of killing and a gentle man would not be able to bear it.[138] Yudhishthira is tormented by this—since the king kills many people while engaged in war, *kṣatra* dharma (the dharma of a Kshatriya) is surely the most sinful of all dharmas. Bhishma seems to implicitly accept this point, but goes on to explain that this sin can be driven away by protecting the people and making them prosper, performing sacrifices, giving gifts, and through asceticism.[139] So the violence inherent in kingship cannot be avoided, but it can be neutralized and atoned for.

The epic does, however, distinguish between wanton, uncivilized violence and considered, necessary force and violence. There are violent people such as the *dasyus* and wild Ashanas (apparently a fierce tribe), who live a life marked by cruelty and violence (*krūra-vṛtti*).[140] This uncivilized, wanton violence is qualitatively different from the necessary violence involved in inflicting punishment (*daṇḍa*) and the violence / anger (*ugratva*) that is the Kshatriya way.[141] The god Krishna is one of the arch proponents of necessary violence throughout the epic. The filling of the royal treasury requires killing,

and some collateral damage is inevitable, just as when a tree has to be cut for making a sacrificial post, other trees that lie in the way are also cut and fall.[142] The king's force is necessary, justified by its ends of maintaining order in the world.

At the same time, there are warnings that the excessive violence of the king can lead to justified violence *against* him. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira that a king with a violent nature (*sāhasa-prakṛti*) perishes. Dharma and *artha* abandon the king who tolerates unrighteousness. A king who goes by the advice of wicked men who do not follow dharma strictly is a slayer of dharma and should be killed by the people. Such a king perishes, along with his associates. The arrogant king who does as he pleases, who does not pursue material gain, is destroyed swiftly, even though he may have conquered the whole earth.[143] Even more blunt is the following statement:

> "A cruel king, who does not protect his people, who robs them in the name of levying taxes, is evil [Kali] incarnate and should be killed by his subjects. A king who, after declaring "I will protect you," does not protect them, should be killed by his people coming together, as though he were a mad dog."[144]

So, in extreme circumstances, where the king violates his dharma in relation to his subjects, the *Mahabharata* sanctions regicide.

The most powerful philosophical response to a whole range issues related to dharma, violence, war, and renunciation in the *Mahabharata* occurs in the *Bhagavadgita* (Song of the Lord), also known as the *Gita*. The *Bhagavadgita* is part of the sixth book of the epic, the Bhishma Parva; it is an important part of the great epic and also has a distinct identity within it.[145] Usually dated between circa 200 BCE and 200 CE, it is assigned by a more recent study to the first century CE.[146] The text has a dramatic narrative frame. The war is about to begin when Arjuna, surveying the enemy array in front of him and seeing his close kin, teachers, and friends in its midst, lays down his arms and declares that he will not fight. It is left to his charioteer, the god Krishna, to explain why he must indeed fight and to convince him to do his duty as a warrior.

The *Bhagavadgita* is philosophically very rich and has inspired a great number of translations, commentaries, and interpretations.[147] It

weaves together strands from the philosophies of Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta with the ideas of duty and religious devotion (*bhakti*). The text can also be seen as Brahmanism's response to Buddhism, a response marked by the acceptance and absorption of some Buddhist ideas (such as impermanence and suffering) as well as a strong rejection of others (such as the denial of the soul).[148] The *Bhagavadgita* reconciles many seemingly irreconcilable elements, including dharma and *mokṣa* (deliverance from the cycle of birth and death). Its idea of *karmayoga* emphasizes the eternal nature of the *ātman* (self) and the importance of following one's *varṇa-dharma;* it is the fruits of actions and not actions themselves that are to be renounced. And although Krishna's long discourse to Arjuna is aimed at urging him to pick up his bow and enter what is going to be a violent, bloody war, the detached warrior must ultimately give up attachment to force (*bala*), along with his sense of ego, pride, desire, anger, and covetousness.[149]

The relationship between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita* formed the model for a new relationship between devotees and the great god in early Hinduism.[150] The text contains different ideas of god—an impersonal cosmic god who is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the world, as well as a god who is immediate and worthy of devotion. These reflect monolatry—the worship of a god as the supreme god without denying the existence of other gods. This kind of religious belief coexisted in early Hinduism with polytheism and monism. Krishna is partially present in various aspects of the cosmos. He descends to earth from time to time and leads his devotees to liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. He is one among many gods, but he is the greatest among them all. This idea of a supreme god has important implications for the theory of kingship. Devoted subordination to a supreme god limits the power of the king but also empowers him. It is a reciprocal relationship. God and king are distanced from ordinary people as well as connected to them in a unique way.

Why does Krishna address his soteriological discourse to Arjuna and not to Yudhishthira, the would-be king? It has been suggested that Arjuna is a temporary stand-in for the king.[151] Another view is that the *Bhagvadgita* represents a response to the idea of absolute royal power (personified by Duryodhana) and announces that the king is both dependent on and responsible to the great, all-powerful god.[152] However, Arjuna seems to stand primarily for the quintessential warrior and devotee. Even if the *Bhagavadgita* theology can be

extended to the domain of kingship, we should remember that it was one of many ideas on the subject that exist within the *Mahabharata*.

In a text whose central narrative is about a terrible war fought for the sake of a kingdom lies a frequent, powerful pull toward renunciation. Bhishma renounces kingship and takes a vow of lifelong celibacy out of devotion to his father Shantanu. But the tension between kingship and renunciation is best brought out in the character of Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira, who epitomizes dharma and kingship, spends a great deal of time after the war grieving about the enormous loss of life it has caused and over his own responsibility for the violence, especially for the killing of his kin. He frequently threatens to give up kingship and go off to the forest to take up a life of renunciation, and has to be repeatedly dissuaded from doing so.

The tension between kingship and renunciation comes to the fore in a Pandava family conference soon after the war.[153] Yudhishthira bitterly berates Kshatriya dharma and his desire for the kingdom, which has led to a violent disaster in which so many parents have lost their sons in the prime of life. He says that he wants to hand over the kingdom to Arjuna and retire to the forest. Arjuna tells him that he should not be weak, that he should fulfill his duties as king and perform the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. Bhima joins in and asks: What was the point of everything if Yudhishthira was going to ignore the dharma of kings and give everything up? Renunciation was all right in one's old age or in a time of trouble, not now. Arjuna pitches in by helpfully offering a new definition of renunciation. He narrates a story about the god Indra, which shows that the highest form of asceticism consists in performing the duties of a householder and eating the remnants of food served to others. Yudhishthira's twin brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, and wife, Draupadi, are also against the idea of his retiring to the forest and urge him to perform his duties toward his subjects and Brahmanas. The bottom line is that for Kshatriyas and kings, renunciation as life's final stage in the *āśrama* scheme is acceptable, but renunciation adopted in the prime of life is not. The sage Vyasa—whose words carry great weight in the epic—says:

> "Oh great king! The inflicting of punishment, and not the shaven head [of the renunciant], is the dharma of the Kshatriya."[154]

The epic tries to reconcile the constant pull between kingship and

renunciation in various ways. One is through the model of the royal sage (*rājarṣi*). There are several royal sages who are so powerful due to their performance of austerities that even the gods dread them. Vasu Uparichara, king of the Chedi kingdom, is one of them.[155] The god Indra fears that he might rival his own rank and persuades him to abandon his austerities and go back to his kingly ways, throwing some very desirable gifts into the deal. Janaka, another king-turned-sage, is also persuaded to abandon his austerities and go back to his kingly ways. Kings should be kings. The *rājarṣi* model that is approved of is that of the king who represents ascetic values while continuing to discharge his royal duties.

The epic ends with Yudhishthira ultimately taking the path of voluntary retirement from life, but it is only after he has discharged his duties as king for over thirty-six years. The five Pandava brothers and their wife Draupadi renounce worldly life, and embark on a long journey, absorbed in yoga, ultimately reaching heaven. So renunciation is ultimately required, but only after fulfilling all one's worldly duties. It is the only way to reach the highest goal, variously described as heaven, oneness with brahman, or the supreme release.

The *Mahabharata* as a whole delineates a new model of kingship and announces a new-age king who embodies many apparently irreconcilable attributes. Bhishma—himself a representative of the warrior of the old age—describes this new age king as one who is

> "a bold and brave warrior, who is compassionate, who has conquered his senses, and who affectionately shares the bounty."[156]

This model king is devoted to the practice and upholding of dharma, practices sweet speech, gentleness, self-control and nonviolence. A redefinition of asceticism allows, in fact, requires, the king to be temperamentally an ascetic. In the discussion on what is superior—asceticism (*tapas*) or sacrifice (*yajña*)—Bhishma gives primacy to asceticism, but redefines it as consisting of nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*), truthful speech (*satya-vacana*), compassion (*ānṛśaṁsya*), self-control (*dama*), and kindness (*ghṛṇā*). This, not emaciating the body, is true asceticism.[157] The *Bhagavadgita* gives a much more detailed philosophical justification of political violence, specifically war, as well as a powerful argument that true renunciation consists of the

renunciation of the fruits of actions, not of actions themselves (this will be discussed in Chapter 4). Kingship and renunciation are no longer polar opposites; they are blended together in the figure of the new-age king.

It has been suggested that the central message of the *Mahabharata,* which tells a tale of extreme violence, is that nonviolence and compassion are the highest duties of an individual.[158] Not really. The epic in fact has no central message. But among many other things, it does suggest that for a king, absolute nonviolence is undesirable and impossible; so is happiness; so is perfection.

Politics in the *Ramayana*

The heroes of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* face a similar problem: They are deprived of their rightful political inheritance because of the ambition and deceit of rival kin. But they deal with it in very different ways. The *Ramayana* is set in the middle Ganga valley in the kingdom of Kosala with its capital at Ayodhya. King Dasharatha has four sons—Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana, and Shatrughna. Rama is the eldest, but the machinations of his stepmother, queen Kaikeyi, who wants to promote the interests of her own son Bharata, lead to his facing a twelve-year exile in the forest. Unlike the Pandavas, who are ready to resort to violence to claim their political right, Rama gives up his right to the throne and heads to the forest accompanied by his devoted brother, Lakshmana, and wife, Sita. Love and fidelity have prevented the outbreak of political conflict among the princes of the kingdom of Kosala, but during their exile in the forest, Sita is abducted by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. This leads to the outbreak of a terrible war. Rama ultimately wins the war and returns to Ayodhya to become king.

The *Ramayana* is both a family melodrama and a political text. Political ambitions lie at the heart of the story, but these are the ambitions of a younger queen, Kaikeyi. No other member of the house of Kosala is tainted by ambition, certainly not Rama, whose right to become king (he is the eldest son) is passed over as a result of Kaikeyi's machinations, and not even Bharata, the one who gains the most as a result. Rama's and Bharata's refusal to accept the kingdom—due to filial and fraternal loyalty, respectively—makes the *Ramayana* a political tale that is very different from the *Mahabharata.* However, under the surface of the image of an almost perfect royal household, the *Ramayana* reveals awareness of political conflicts and anxieties.

The political geography of the *Ramayana* is a mixture of reality, myth, and fantasy, with the latter two increasing taking over as the story's locale moves southward. The three important kingdoms—those of Kosala, Kishkindha, and Lanka—are inhabited by three different kinds of beings. Kosala, ruled from Ayodhya by kings of the Ikshvaku lineage, is one among many kingdoms of humans. Kishkindha (the geographical location of which is the subject of debate) is a kingdom of monkeys (*vānaras*), ruled over at different times by Vali and

Sugriva, and transports us to a world tinged with folk fantasy.[159] Lanka, which is traditionally identified with the modern island of Sri Lanka, is a kingdom of demons, ruled over by the powerful and arrogant king Ravana. All three kingdoms have certain things in common. They have magnificent capital cities with opulent palaces. Lanka matches Ayodhya in physical splendor, although not in terms of the righteousness of its people and its prince. The protocol and administrative infrastructure of all three kingdoms have similar elements. And the rulers of all three kingdoms are part of a web of kinship relations marked by affection as well as succession conflicts.

This epic also very strongly emphasizes primogeniture. Rama is considered the rightful heir to the kingdom because he is the eldest son. Primogeniture also rules in the kingdom of Lanka. But in Kishkindha, this principle is overturned, and Rama supports the claims of the younger brother, Sugriva. The justification Rama offers is that although Vali was older, he had committed the crime of having sex with Sugriva's wife. Nevertheless, this justification is not accepted easily in the *Ramayana* tradition, and Rama's support of Sugriva's claim to the throne of Kishkindha and more so, the manner in which he kills Vali by shooting an arrow into his back, cast a shadow over his trademark rectitude.

While the *Mahabharata* offers a new model of kingship, its complex characters do not really appear to be great role models. The *Ramayana,* on the other hand, offers many models of exemplary behavior. Rama is the ideal son and king, and his wife, Sita, the ideal wife. While there is a certain amount of stereotyping of positive and negative characters, they are not entirely black and white. Ravana and his siblings are sons of the great sage, Pulastya, who is the son of the god Brahma. Many of the demons are ugly, violent, flesh-eating creatures, wont to disrupting the sacrifices of the sages. There are some noble ones who worship the gods and perform austerities and Vedic sacrifices. Ravana himself is a great devotee of the god Shiva. But the overall portrayal of the demons definitely tilts toward the negative. Although some of them perform sacrifices, as a group, they do not respect the sacrificial *order;* some of them may be moral, but as a collectivity, they are not committed to the moral *order*.

As in the *Mahabharata,* the unfolding of the *Ramayana* story is presented as part of a divine plan. Rama, his brothers, and the *vānaras* are created as part of this divine plan. We are told that the gods, sages, *gandharvas* (celestial beings), and *siddhas* (demigods)

approached the god Brahma and told him that the wicked demon Ravana was oppressing them all; he obstructed their activities; his roars disrupted the ascetics' meditation. He was able to do all this with impunity because he had sought and received a boon from Brahma that he could not be killed by any god, *gandharva, yakṣa* (a demigod), or demon. Due to his contempt for humans, Ravana did not seek to be made invulnerable to them. For this reason, Brahma observed, he could be killed only by a human. The god Vishnu arrived on the scene, and the gods beseeched him to divide himself into four parts and take birth on earth as the offspring of king Dasharatha and his three wives. Dasharatha was performing a grand horse sacrifice in order to obtain a son and heir, and this was followed by a special son-producing sacrifice. A mighty resplendent being arose out of the sacrificial fire and, handing a bowl of divine rice pudding (*pāyasa*) to the king, told him that he should offer it to his three queens. The king gave half the pudding to Kausalya, one-third to Sumitra, one-eighth to Kaikeyi, and the rest to Sumitra. The four brothers—Rama, Bharata, and the twins, Lakshmana and Shatrughna—who were born to the three queens were parts of Vishnu. The *vānaras*—marvelous beings in the form of monkeys—were created by Vishnu at the instructions of Brahma in order to help Rama. It was an incredible mission—a demon who could not be killed by the gods was to be killed by a man, or rather a god in the form of a man. During the ensuing events, the gods appear at various points of time as observers and interveners. They are spectators of Rama's war against Ravana. When Rama publicly questions Sita's chastity, and she undergoes an ordeal by fire, the gods intervene, and urge him not to humiliate his innocent wife as though he were an ordinary man. When Rama asks the profound question, "Who am I?," it is the gods who reveal to him his divinity and his divine mission.

While some scholars argue that Rama was transformed from a mortal hero into an incarnation (*avatāra*) of god Vishnu at a later stage in the development of the epic, others hold that he was considered divine from the very beginning. Direct assertions of Rama's divinity are concentrated in the first and last books of the *Ramayana.* For the most part, Rama remains charmingly unaware of his godliness. Nevertheless, he is divine, and the nature and quality of his divinity are very different from those of the Pandava brothers in that he is a god who is the focus of devotion.

Like the *Mahabharata,* the *Ramayana* muses on the efficacy of

human endeavor and the question of human responsibility in view of the inevitability of fate (*daiva*), the law of karma, and the power of curses and boons. The two villains of the *Ramayana* are the queen mother Kaikeyi and the demon Ravana. Both are eventually exonerated in the epic through the argument that they were not personally responsible for their wicked deeds; they were simply doing what they were fated to do. At one point, the brothers Rama and Lakshmana have a debate on fate versus human effort and the use of violence to secure one's right.[160] Lakshmana argues that only the weak and cowardly invoke fate. He asserts that he himself is stronger than fate and urges Rama to have himself consecrated king; he will kill all those who come in the way. Rama is unmoved by these arguments and asserts that he is steadfast in obeying his father's command because that is the path of the good. He strongly defends fate and says that Kaikeyi should not be blamed for what has happened.[161] Everything that had transpired was fated to happen. Rama ends the debate by telling Lakshmana that no one is his own master. Fate determines everything. This is the *Ramayana*'s ultimate position on the matter.

At the end of the epic, Rama is a paramount king. His far-flung dominion is symbolized by the fact that water from the four oceans and five hundred rivers is used for his consecration ceremony. He is overlord not only of all the human kingdoms but also those of the *vānaras* and of the demons. The epic attaches great importance to the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*) as the premier rite of political paramountcy, and Rama performs not one but one hundred.[162]

Dharma is a central positive principle in the *Ramayana,* and the main story line advocates that it is not to be questioned or doubted beyond a point. There are many people who, because of their personal qualities or their station, exemplify dharma. Rama is the preeminent epitome of dharma and its upholder. But there are many others, including certain wise animals, who know it and are devoted to it. Following dharma does not necessarily lead to happiness. But it does have an efficacy, and its fruits include attaining heaven.

Rama is devoted to dharma and is the best of would-be-kings and kings. The king is the protector of the earth, but on several occasions, kingship is said to be a burden. For instance, when Rama hands over the reigns of kingship to Bharata, the latter exclaims,

> "What strength have I to bear such a burden? I am like a calf before a load only a great ox can draw."[163]

Like the *Mahabharata,* the *Ramayana* promotes the ideal of the sage-like king (*rājarṣi*). Rama, the ideal king-designate, is like a *ṛṣi* (sage) in his devotion to dharma. He gives up his kingdom for dharma and goes to the forest without regret or rancor, saying that he does not desire wealth or power.

Can Rama, a god-king, form a role model for mortal kings? He can, because the problems and dilemmas he faces are utterly human, as are their resolutions. The importance of Rama's characterization arises not merely from his being an ideal king or even a god. It arises from his being the ideal man, who can be emulated by all men, including kings. The *Ramayana* begins with Valmiki asking the sage Narada who is the best among humans, and latter's answer is Rama. Apart from the fact that he is the eldest son, Rama's claims to kingship are also based on the fact that he embodies the qualities of perfection of an ideal man *and* an ideal king. These include filial piety, the absence of personal ambition or desire for power, and equanimity in the face of extreme adversity. Central to the epic's main narrative is that he always keeps his word, even if it involves enormous personal sacrifice. Ravana is Rama's alter ego. Although he has some positive qualities, they are outweighed by the negative ones—he is arrogant, cruel, prone to anger, attached to drinking and sensual pleasures, and lusts

after other men's wives. This last one proves to be his fatal flaw.[164]

The *Ramayana*'s idea of the ideal kingdom is encapsulated in the description of Rama's rule.[165] The king performed many sacrifices, together with his friends, brothers, and kin. These include the great ones such as the *aśvamedha, vājapeya,* and *pauṇḍarīka,* performed not once but many times (the *aśvamedha* one hundred times). During Rama's rule, nature was beneficent—the rains came at the right time, the breeze was always pleasant, and trees were always laden with flowers and fruit. People lived for thousands of years and had thousands of sons. Elders never had to perform funeral rites for their progeny, nor were there any mourning widows. There was no fear of snakes or thieves. People lived free from sorrow, disease, and misfortune and never harmed one another. The people looked up to Rama as a model.

> Under Rama's rule, his people pursued their own proper occupations and were content with performing their own duties. Devoted to dharma, they always adhered to the truth. All were endowed with auspicious marks, all were devoted to dharma. Thus did Rama rule his kingdom for ten thousand years.[166]

The king of the *Ramayana* is a paternalistic protector of his people and a maintainer of the social order. This is why in Book 7, Rama kills the Shudra Shambuka, who, contrary to *varṇa* norms, has taken to performing austerities. But through most of the epic, Rama's relationship with his subjects is described as one of mutual love. Rama is not attached to the power of kingship, but he is attached to his subjects. When asked by the gods to return to heaven to protect them, his sense of duty toward his subjects impels him to first complete his tasks on earth. The people are given a much greater importance in the *Ramayana* than in the *Mahabharata,* perhaps more importance than in any other ancient Indian text. After killing Ravana, Rama shines on the battlefield, surrounded by his *people,* as Indra is surrounded by the gods. Public opinion assumes paramount importance with tragic personal consequences once Rama becomes king. When the common people cast aspersions on queen Sita's chastity as she had been forced to spend a considerable amount of time in Ravana's clutches in Lanka, he cannot bear the gossip and rather than remaining the subject of scandal, orders Lakshmana to take away and abandon the pregnant

queen in the hermitage of the sage Valmiki.

Although Rama is presented as an ideal man and ideal king, in the larger *Ramayana* tradition, two events raise questions about his righteousness. One is his killing Vali and the other is his abandoning Sita. Perhaps it is these two chinks in his armor that save him from utter and tedious perfection and give the story an important element of tension and pathos. But the flaws of the bad king are best illustrated in the delineation of the character of Ravana—arrogance and licentiousness.

Dharma does occasionally come in for questioning in the *Ramayana.* One of the most eloquent critiques comes from Lakshmana, when the battle against the powerful demons is raging. Rama faints from grief when Hanuman tells him that Indrajit had killed Sita (Indrajit had actually created an illusion of Sita). Cradling his brother in his arms, Lakshmana laments that dharma has not been able to protect him; it is useless and not conducive to happiness. Dharma should not be practiced to the exclusion of the other goals of human existence. *Artha* is greater than dharma. The fact that Rama, the great adherent and practitioner of dharma, has undergone so much suffering, raises questions about the power of virtue. Going even further, Lakshmana says

> "Since we cannot directly perceive dharma in the same way that we perceive still and moving objects, my opinion is that it does not exist."[167]

It is a long and passionate critique, but it does not represent the view of the epic's protagonist.

The *Ramayana* tells us that the genesis of the *shloka* meter (in which it is composed) lay in the poet Valmiki's intense, spontaneous outpouring of grief and compassion when a Nishada hunter killed the male of a pair of sweet-voiced *kraunca* birds. The god Brahma told him to compose the story of Rama in that very meter.[168] Compassion is also important in other places in the epic. Rama is willing to, and does, resort to violence to rescue his abducted wife (the war will be discussed in Chapter 4). But otherwise, there are several places in the *Ramayana* where violence is decried. One of these is the story of king Sagara's sons, which connects kingship, sacrifice, and violence.[169] While looking for the king's sacrificial horse, which has been stolen by the god Indra, the princes violently dig up the earth with their hands and ploughs and kill its creatures, including the serpents and demons. The earth cries out in pain, and Brahma intervenes to stop the carnage. Another incident that connects violence with misfortune takes place when prince Dasharatha kills an ascetic while on a hunting expedition on the banks of the Sarayu river. It is this act of violence that leads to the ascetic's father's curse that Dasharatha will die grieving for his own son, a curse that was to plunge the royal house of Kosala into a crisis.

The threat of the use of violence to wrest political power hovers on the fringes of the narrative. When he delays Rama's consecration by one fateful day, Dasharatha hints at the possibility of his changing his mind and that Bharata might challenge Rama's elevation. In these circumstances, was queen Kaikeyi's maid, Manthara (who suggested to her the strategy to elevate Bharata to the throne), wicked or simply worldly-wise? Lakshmana in fact urges Rama to use force and seize the kingdom. He says that there is no need to honor the promise of a father who appears to be in his second childhood. Rama's mother, Kausalya, too, is not averse to the idea; she urges Rama to refuse to go into exile, stay in Kosala, and fulfill his duty toward her, his mother. But Rama replies that obeying the father is the family tradition and refuses to use violence in order to seize the kingdom. Addressing Lakshmana, he says:

> "So abandon this way of thinking based on the noble kshatra dharma. Think like me and follow dharma, not violence

[*taikṣṇya*]."[170]

Later, when Bharata comes to the forest to meet Rama, Lakshmana doubts his motives and offers to kill him and Kaikeyi. Killing someone who has caused one harm, he argues, does not violate dharma. But Rama has complete faith in Bharata's loyalty and tells Lakshmana to desist—a son cannot kill his father, nor a brother his brother. Unlike the heroes of the *Mahabharata,* Rama is unwilling to use violence against his kin for the sake of the kingdom. The violence he later initiates is to rescue his wife, Sita, from the demon Ravana.

Powerful, intense love drives the *Ramayana,* mitigates the elements of conflict and violence, and gives it its enormous appeal. The reciprocal love between Rama and the people of Ayodhya stands out. It is the all-important emotional glue that holds the political story together. The people's hearts overflow with love for Rama. Rama loves the people and shares in their joys and sorrows as though he were their father. The people spontaneously express their reactions to the unfolding events and echo the feelings of the main characters. They follow Rama's chariot, clinging to it when he leaves Ayodhya, refusing to turn back even after Dasharatha does. They lament that their lives are over, as they will never see Rama again. Rama is the savior of people and leads them to heaven. But Rama's relationship of love extends beyond his subjects to all beings. Rama loves all creatures and all creatures love him. He has compassion for all creatures, even inanimate beings, and they, in turn, are devoted to him. Rama is the refuge of all beings (*śaraṇyaḥ sarvabhūtānām*). This is no ordinary love; it leads to salvation.

Although the performance of the horse sacrifice at the end of the *Ramayana* represents a claim to political paramountcy, Rama gets his magnificence not from being the mightiest monarch among kings, but due to his strong commitment to duty—to his father and to his people—and the unique reciprocal love that he shares with all beings. This is brought out graphically at the end of the epic. After Lakshmana's death, when Rama wants to give up kingship and retire to the forest, Vasishtha tells him to ascertain the people's opinion on the matter. They tell Rama that they want to accompany him wherever he goes. The procession that makes its way to the Sarayu river is preceded by the sacred fires. Behind the fires walks Rama, dressed in white, carrying sacred *kusha* grass in his hands, reciting mantras. He is

accompanied by the goddess of royal prosperity and the earth goddess. Behind them are Rama's bow and arrows in human form; the Vedas in the form of Brahmanas; the god Savitri; and the sacred syllables. All the people of Ayodhya—town and country folk, high and low, young and old—walk behind them. The magnificent, joyous procession is very different from the Pandavas' last lonely journey.

The Two Registers of Dharma

Before ending this discussion, we need to acknowledge another source that speaks eloquently about the evolution of the ideas of kingship that we have been tracing through texts and inscriptions—coinage. The dynastic affiliations of early punch-marked silver coins and copper-cast coins are not certain, but the symbols on them are revealing. The motifs stamped on the early coins display a preponderance of animals and auspicious symbols. Among the animals, the elephant, humped bull, lion, and horse (the very animals that adorn the abacus of the Ashoka's Sarnath capital!) dominate. The wheel—that potent and multivalent symbol—also occurs. Anthropomorphic figures gradually make their appearance, and most of them seem to represent gods and goddesses.

It is intriguing that the figure of the king seems to be virtually absent on punch-marked coins, unless some of the anthropomorphic figures actually represent kings, not deities, or unless there is deliberate ambiguity. A silver punch-marked coin that may belong to the Maurya period bears what is possibly a direct representation of royalty.[171] It has three figures: Do they represent a king along with his consorts, possibly even Ashoka? Another striking piece of numismatic evidence comes from an early cast-copper coin type of Ujjain in western India, dated to the second century BCE or earlier. It shows a female figure flanked by two men, one of whom carries a bow. Is it possible that they represent Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana?[172] If so, we have numismatic proof of the importance of *Ramayana* imagery in the political domain at a very early date.

Ashoka's inscriptions give the earliest testimony of the awareness of the problem of political violence, both in its internal application toward subjects (punishment, incarceration) and its external application toward other states and forest people (war), but these issues were also the subject of reflection in many other texts. The *Mahabharata* demonstrates the clear and close connections between intra-lineage contests for power and war, and broods on the violence inherent in the quest for kingship. The texts discussed in this chapter were foundational to the way in which Indian political discourse evolved over the succeeding centuries. Although they have a distinctiveness in their philosophical moorings, perspective, and

emphasis, they also share certain common concerns and ideas. They recognize the role of the king as a mediator between human society, nature, and the gods; they make analogies between the goodness of the king and the prosperity of the realm; and they allude to ideas of the king's magico-religious powers.[173] But more important is the fact that they represent the earliest attempts to anchor kingship in a discourse of morality and duty, and they recognize the problem of cruelty and violence in the exercise of political power, especially in relation to taxation and punishment. They introduce the idea of the paramount king who combines extensive conquest with exceptional martial and moral qualities. However, the use of the specific term *cakravartin* for this paramount king is highlighted more in the Buddhist than the epic tradition, perhaps because the term had acquired a strong Buddhist imprint.

The idea of cruel kings meeting a bad end is pervasive in the Indian tradition. Bhima kills Duryodhana; Rama kills Ravana. But neither Duryodhayana nor Ravana is a bad *king*. They are portrayed as villains in terms of certain negative traits of their character (though they also have some positive traits). Their killing is justified on the grounds of their having transgressed the rights of their rivals—in one case political, in the other case, personal. We have also seen how many texts (the *Mahabharata* stands out in this regard) brood over the burdens, dilemmas, and inherent violence of kingship. The discourse ultimately justifies and exalts the institution of kingship, but the questioning and critique of political violence are never completely extinguished.

All the texts discussed in this chapter were highly influential in the long run. The political ideals of the early Buddhist canon were to exercise a strong impact all over the Asian Buddhist world. This is also the case with the legend of Ashoka, whose epigraphic voice was smothered by Buddhist myth and adulation. Within the Indian subcontinent, as we shall see in Chapter 2, it was the epics that had the most powerful long-term impact on Indian political discourse. In its description of the rule of Rama, the *Ramayana* presents a model of an ideal king ruling an ideal kingdom. The *Mahabharata* talks about the problems and dilemmas of kingship using a much more sophisticated and evolved political vocabulary than the *Ramayana* or early Buddhist texts. Whether the epic composers were borrowing from the ideas and writings of political theorists or vice versa is not clear.

What was the relationship between the Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina political discourses? The negative imaging of mendicants in the *Mahabharata* suggests a relationship of tension between its Brahmana composers and the Buddhist, possibly also Jaina, monastic orders. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira that a monk does not become a monk (*bhikṣuka*) merely by the outward form of leaving the householder's life, by shaving his head, and by begging. Those bald men who abandon the Veda, their occupations, and their families, wear ochre robes, and travel around to receive gifts and pursue idle enjoyments—they are not true renunciants, nor are they truly free. They merely display the flag of dharma.[174] Bhishma advises Yudhishthira that there should be no beggars (this would probably also have included religious mendicants) or barbarians (*dasyus*) in his kingdom.[175] Further, an abundance of monks and ascetics is one of the features in Bhishma's description of a kingless state of chaos.[176]

But the fact that certain characters, episodes, and ideas in the Sanskrit epics also occur in the Buddhist and Jaina traditions alerts us to other aspects of the cultural conversations of the times. Rama and Sita feature in the Buddhist Dasharatha Jataka (the Jatakas are stories of the previous lives of the Buddha), except that here, they are brother and sister. Stories about king Mandhatri and Shibi became part of the larger storehouse of tales about legendary kings. Debates over kingship, dharma, and violence are found in all traditions. The element of intertextuality has been recognized in the case of the *Mahabharata,* which has been seen as a Brahmanical response to the challenge presented by Buddhism and Ashoka.[177] Ideas of merit and sin, heaven and hell cut across religious traditions and are important parts of Ashoka's political discourse. Buddhist resonances can be seen in the *Mahabharata*'s repeated reference to human suffering; its linking of ignorance, desire, greed, and sorrow; its rejection of extreme asceticism; and in the statement that knowledge is like a raft.[178] In the *Ramayana* too, while consoling his brother Lakshmana, Rama expresses a pessimistic view of life, ruminating about the inevitability of old age, decrepitude, and death.

> "Death walks by your side, death sits next to you. Even if you travel far away, death will come back with you."[179]

Another interesting parallel with Buddhism is the reference to the

wheel of dharma, present from the very beginning of time. Bhishma urges Yudhishthira to make people turn on that wheel.[180] The *Ramayana* also refers to the wheel of dharma along with the god Vishnu's wheel and the wheel of time.[181]

Whether we are looking at Brahmanical borrowings from Buddhism and Jainism or whether all these traditions were absorbing elements from a common pool of circulating ideas is a question that is difficult to answer with certainty. It was probably a bit of both. The emphasis on compassion and nonviolence in the Brahmanical tradition (of which the epics are a part) may have been an outcome of an interface not only with Buddhism but also with Jainism. However, a certain amount of questioning, including ruminations on violence and asceticism, was, no doubt, also going on independently among the Brahmanical intelligentsia.

There were two registers of dharma, including the dharma of the king—one absolute, the other contextual—and both were acknowledged. That the former was not lost sight of is clear from the fact that Yudhishthira pays a heavy price for the one lie he told in his life, in order to kill Drona, and the fact that Rama's killing of Vali continued to haunt his reputation for centuries. Nonviolence was a part of the ethics of the early Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions, with much greater importance in the latter two. But in all three traditions, it was part of a larger set of ethical precepts, a means to a higher end, related to the ideas of karma and merit, heaven and hell. And it was not enough to attain the highest goal, *mokṣa,* which lay beyond distinctions of violence and nonviolence, beyond all morality.

There was a recognition that the king's duties necessitated the use of a certain amount of force, and the texts debate how this necessity could be measured. Political violence remained a reality that aroused unease and concern, and a problem to which there was no clear or easy solution. In the midst of the various discussions and deliberations on violence and nonviolence, it is one voice and one voice alone that resounds with strong conviction across the centuries, firm and unwavering—that of Ashoka. But notwithstanding his repeated exhortations about nonviolence toward all beings as part of the way of life that leads to merit and heaven, in his warning to the forest people and his retention of capital punishment, Ashoka expresses his realization that absolute nonviolence could not be practiced by a king.

CHAPTER TWO

Transition

In 187 BCE, Pushyamitra Shunga, the Brahmana commander in chief of the Maurya army, staged a swift and decisive military coup, killing king Brihadratha while the latter was inspecting his troops. Pushyamitra is said to have performed the great *aśvamedha,* or horse sacrifice, a complex and violent Vedic sacrifice whose hallmark was the free roaming of the sacrificial horse for a year, accompanied by armed men ready to battle all who dared impede its progress. The horse seems to have represented *kṣatra,* or royal dominion. This "king of sacrifices" was associated with claims to political paramountcy and was believed to bestow victory on the king and fertility and prosperity on his realm.[1] Rama and Yudhishthira had performed it, but several later Vedic texts describe it as having fallen out of vogue (*utsanna*). Pushyamitra's association with the *aśvamedha* and legends of his persecution of Buddhist monks are sometimes seen as reflective of a powerful Brahmanical reaction against the Mauryas' patronage of Jainism and Buddhism.

The end of the Maurya empire coincided with a series of invasions from the northwest. Between the second century BCE and first century CE, the Bactrian Greeks, initially subordinates of the Seleucid empire of West Asia, established their independence and pressed south of the Hindu Kush to found the Indo-Greek kingdom. From the first century BCE, the consolidation of the Chinese empire led to upheavals and tribal movements in Central Asia, and armies of the Shakas, Pahlavas, and then the Kushanas crossed the northwestern mountains and entered the subcontinent. Although Afghanistan remained the center of their empire, the Kushana kings extended their political control from the Indus valley up to Mathura. The viceroys of the Shaka–

Pahlavas, known as Kshatrapas, ruled in western India, the two most important lines being the Kshaharatas and Kardamakas. The Chedi dynasty established itself in Kalinga in eastern India, while the Satavahanas were the major political force in the Deccan. Farther south, the Chola, Chera, and Pandya kings held their own in the midst of a multitude of warring chieftains (see Map 3).The numerous invasions, inter-dynastic wars, and continuing conflicts between states and forest tribes reflect a significant increase in the theaters and intensity of political violence between circa 200 BCE and 300 CE.

The discourse on kingship sharpened, expanded, and evolved in important ways at the cusp of the new millennium. Treatises on politics (*arthaśāstra*) dealt with the use of force and violence by and against the king in unprecedented detail. A new textual genre known as *kāvya* (literature) was born. Royal inscriptions increased in number, cutting across dynasty and region, and their eulogies (*praśastis*) expressed an increasingly defined and refined political ideology. The earliest clear representations of kings appeared in sculptural and numismatic art. This chapter discusses these momentous centuries, with a special focus on the discussion and representation of the king's force and violence in political discourse.

The *Arthashastra:* Politics as the Art of Material Gain

Kautilya, the putative author of the *Arthashastra,* has often been compared with the fifteenth–sixteenth-century Italian Machiavelli, author of *Il Principe* (The Prince). Given their relative chronological position, it makes more sense to describe Machiavelli as the Italian Kautilya. However, even a cursory glance at the two works shows that apart from the vast chronological and cultural gulf that separates them, Machiavelli's vision of politics and the state pales in comparison with Kautilya's, both in terms of conceptualization and detail.

MAP 3 Dynasties of India, c. 200 BCE–300 CE

From Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India from the Stone Age to the 12th century;* Courtesy: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.

Ashoka became a victim of his fame and was set in stone as a pious

Buddhist king. Kautilya, on the other hand, became a victim of his notoriety. Branded as the arch proponent of realpolitik, in which the ends justify the means, the *Arthashastra* needs to be understood within the context of the ideas of its time.[2] Its apparent amoral unscrupulousness can be seen as an attempt to define politics from the perspective of the king's political and material gain. Kautilya defined a political sphere, injected a strong dose of pragmatic reason and argument into political discourse, and made a strong case for the regulation and perhaps even mitigation of the random violence and capriciousness that must have characterized ancient states.

The text, written in compact prose interspersed with some verses, consists of fifteen books (*adhikaraṇas*), divided into 150 sections (*adhyāyas*) and 180 topics (*prakaraṇas*). There are differences of opinion about its date. Some scholars think that its compositional history may go back to the Maurya period, with later interpolations and changes over the later centuries. They accept the idea that the author Kautilya can be identified with Chanakya, minister of the Maurya king Chandragupta, who played a critical role in the replacement of Nanda rule by that of the Mauryas. On the other hand, others date the *Arthashastra* to the early centuries CE. Patrick Olivelle has suggested that while the prehistory of the work may go back to the mid-first century BCE, the first major redaction was composed between circa 50 and 125 CE, and the second one between circa 175 and 300 CE.[3]

In view of the continuing debate over its age, it is best to treat the *Arthashastra* as a text whose composition ranged over several centuries, before and after the turn of the millennium. I will treat the text as a unitary whole, examining its entire range of ideas instead of trying to carve it up into different chronological layers.[4] When I refer to "Kautilya," I use the name as a short-hand for the various authors (including, probably, one named Kautilya) who must have contributed to creating the text that has come down to us. The text's fame and the formidable reputation acquired by its author point to the fact that it addressed issues of great practical political concern and import over a very long period of time, influencing political thought not only in the Indian subcontinent, but also in Southeast Asia.

Much of the misunderstanding of the *Arthashastra* arises from a lack of recognition of what it is—a theoretical treatise (*śāstra*) that claims to lay down norms not for a particular king or state but for all time to come. Moreover, the fact that it is a theoretical treatise on *artha* means that its author was *obliged* to discuss statecraft from the specific perspective and goals of *artha* in the broad sense of material gain. Kautilya speaks of the need to balance the goals of human existence, known as the *puruṣārthas*, but for him,

> *Artha* [material well-being] is supreme because dharma [righteousness] and *kāma* [sensual pleasure] are dependent on it.[5]

The *Arthashastra* explicitly presents itself as based on a combination of theoretical knowledge (*śāstra*) and practice (*prayoga*).[6] Kautilya tells us that he had made these rules of governance for the sake of kings after having gone through all the treatises on the subject and after having acquired an understanding of practice.[7] Apart from kings, the audience of the text must have included members of the political elite, including high-ranking officials and courtiers. Addressing this audience was a text that laid down basic principles of governance from the perspective of the interests of the king and the state.[8]

In order to understand Kautilya's contribution to Indian political thought, it is necessary to reconstruct the debate in which he intervened. Tradition was important in the Indian *śāstric* discourse, and Kautilya acknowledges and invokes it. The opening invocation in the *Arthashastra* (to Shukra and Brihaspati, preceptors of the demons and the gods) is immediately followed by the statement that this work had been prepared mostly by putting together the *arthaśāstras* composed by earlier experts for the acquisition and protection of the earth.[9] At various places in the text, Kautilya refers to the opinions of specific authorities as well as the experts (*ācāryas*) collectively, and positions himself vis-à-vis their ideas, very often through disagreement.[10] The topics where many authorities are frequently cited and which were evidently subjects of heated debate include crime and punishment; the appointment of counselors and ministers; the calamities (*vyasanas*) of the state; the powers (*śaktis*) of the king;

and war.

But there are many sections in the *Arthashastra* where very few authorities are cited. These include those on topics dealing with the king and princes in Book 1, such as the discipline and training of the prince; the control of the senses; the life of a sage-like king; the appointment of ministers and the royal chaplain; secret agents; winning over seducible and non-seducible parties in the enemy's territory; rules for envoys; the conduct of a prince in disfavor; rules for the king's conduct; regulations for the royal residence; and the protection of the king's person. Book 2, a long book that discusses the responsibilities of the heads of administrative departments and state control over and participation in the economy, refers to specific authorities only in relation to one issue (fines on officials who cause loss of revenue). Furthermore, there are entire books where there is no mention of any specific authority—for instance, Book 4 (on the suppression of criminals), Book 6 (on the circle of kings, that is, interstate policy), Book 11 (on the oligarchies), Book 13 (on the means of taking a fort), Book 14 (on secret practices), and Book 15 (on the method of the *śāstra*). These probably contain Kautilya's original contributions. In fact, the *Arthashastra*'s reputation and authority must have rested not as much on its agreement as its disagreement with earlier authorities, and on its introduction of a new treatment, perspective, and synthesis on the subject of statecraft, one that was meticulous, methodical, rigorous and logical. Its methodology is made explicit in the *tantrayukti* section at the end of book which lists thirty-two devices of treatment of the subject; these include reason, explanation, advice, application, analogy, implication, doubt, context, illustration, the prima facie view, and the correct view.[11]

Kautilya identifies four types of knowledge (*vidyās*)—*anvīkṣikī* (philosophy), *trayī* (the Veda), *vārttā* (economics), and *daṇḍanīti* (the science of politics). Disagreeing with other authorities, he describes *anvīkṣikī* as the lamp of all the branches of knowledge, the means of all actions, and the support of all dharmas.[12] The discipline of *arthaśāstra* was *vārttā* from a political perspective; and it was *daṇḍanīti* from the point of view of the king's material gain. This was the new discipline of political economy, which confidently explains itself thus:

> *Artha* [material well-being or wealth] means the livelihood of men; in other words, it means the earth inhabited by men. *Arthaśāstra* is the discipline [*śāstra*] which is the means of attaining and protecting that earth.[13]

Because it is the king who is capable of acquiring and protecting the earth (which is the source of the livelihood of men), *arthaśāstra* is also the science of statecraft or politics. In fact, it combines the study of governance, political economy, and political expansion. If not the first, Kautilya was certainly the most masterly exponent of the discipline.

Some elements of the conceptual vocabulary used by Kautilya preceded him (they are present in the epics, especially the *Mahabharata*), but his achievement was to weave together various elements to construct a connected, comprehensive, and detailed political discourse from the perspective of economic and political gain, thereby introducing a new vision of a potential state. This discipline regards humans and the elements of nature (including animals) primarily as economic resources; and the goal of the economic activity of the state is the maximization of production and profit, understood both in political and economic terms. Kautilya's achievement was to spell out a complete conceptual structure for the state and to suggest that governance required an understanding of this structure and that political decisions involved making judicious choices.

Although there is no overarching word for "state" in the text, the references to different types of polities indicate that Kautilya had the idea of a state that transcended particularities of specific types of political systems. Although he has for the most part a kingdom (*rājya*) in mind, he also refers to oligarchies (*saṅghas*). The fact that he devotes a full chapter to how the *vijigīṣu* (the king desirous of victory) should deal with oligarchies, pointing to their susceptibility to dissension and destruction through gambling, indicates that Kautilya considered them a political force to reckon with. The few illustrative references to specific kings are taken from legend and the epic tradition, which must have been in a somewhat fluid form at the time.[14] This reliance on traditional history, this deliberate avoidance of "history" as understood by the modern historian, is not unusual in a *śāstra* that claims to speak in terms of universals. It is interesting that Kautilya does name specific historical oligarchies.[15] However, his discussion of statecraft is from the perspective of a monarchical state.

In ancient texts and as well as modern scholarship, the *Arthashastra* is associated with an organic theory of the state consisting of seven elements (*prakṛtis*): namely, the king (*svāmin*), minister (*amātya*), territory plus people (*janapada*), fort (*durga*), treasury (*kośa*), force / justice (*daṇḍa*), and ally (*mitra*).[16] There seem to be some connections between political theory and medical knowledge. The *āyurveda* medical treatises speak of the seven elements of the body, and as we shall see, the political treatises resonate with the ideas of health,

disease, and cure with which the medical treatises grappled, although in the context of the body politic rather than the human body.

But the *Arthashastra* is not explicitly structured around the seven elements. In fact, the listing of the elements occurs for the first time in the sixth book and is repeated in Book 8.[17] The sequence of the topics discussed in the *Arthashastra* suggests a conceptual ordering consisting of four interrelated themes arranged in the following sequence: the king; the bureaucracy related to administration; the management of the economy; interstate relations and war. The conceptual scaffolding of the text as a whole includes the idea of the seven limbs of the state, but this idea collapses without the support of other ideas—especially those of the circle of kings, the three kinds of powers (*śaktis*) of the king, the four policy expedients (*upāyas*), the six strategies in dealing with other states (*guṇas*), and the calamities (*vyasanas*) of the king and the kingdom. It has been suggested that the fact that Kautilya uses a similar vocabulary of concepts and strategies in his discussion of "internal" and "external" politics indicates that he does not distinguish between them.[18] This is incorrect. In fact, Kautilya's organic conceptualization of the state presents it as consisting of distinct, but interconnected elements.

The terms for king in the *Arthashastra* are fairly unostentatious.[19] Of the various terms for kingdom and / or territory, *janapada* occurs most often.[20] It includes both territory and the people inhabiting it. More important than the terminology is the fact that the discussion of political and administrative units includes their resources and the people who inhabit these spaces. Kautilya states that an ideal *janapada* is secure from attack, provides excellent resources, commodities, and means of livelihood, and is inhabited mostly by the lower *varṇas*.[21] The last of these stipulations seems to be based on the concern for maximizing production, since the Vaishyas and Shudras are the producing classes.

It has been suggested (incorrectly) by some scholars that Kautilya visualized a comingling of the borders of the territory of the king and that of his enemy.[22] Actually, he clearly distinguishes between the principality of the king and that of others.[23] Although ancient kingdoms did not have clearly demarcated territorial boundaries, Kautilya assumes and repeatedly refers to the *idea* of such clearly identifiable borders, on land, river, and sea, especially as places where the inflow of people and goods into the principality could be filtered. His discussion of seals, sealed passports, and officers responsible for

them indicates that he has the idea of institutionalizing border crossing.[24]

In later times, the term *sāmanta* was the title of a subordinate ruler or a vassal. There are a few places in the *Arthashastra* where there is some ambiguity about its meaning.[25] But by and large, the term seems to have two denotations in the text—a neighboring cultivator or a neighboring king.[26] The idea of a graded hierarchy of kings with a paramount king and various subordinates is, however, implied in the discussion of interstate relations, the idea of the *vijigīṣu* (the king desirous of victory) and the description of the righteous victor (discussed in Chapter 4).

Kautilya's discussion of the strategies that the *vijigīṣu* should adopt clearly indicates the idea of empire-building. The goal of political paramountcy is implied in the idea that a king should aim at enjoying the earth without sharing it with any other ruler.[27] The *cakravartī-kṣetra* (field of conquest of the *cakravartin* or emperor) is described as the region between the Himalayas and the sea, one thousand *yojana*s across in extent.[28] (This is the only place in the text where the term *cakravartin* occurs). There is also a detailed mapping of the produce of regions of the subcontinent; this mapping extends north-south from the Himalayas to Sri Lanka; and east-west from Kamarupa (in Assam) up to the land of the Parthians in the northwest. But the discussion is not geared toward the potential productive assets of various possible military targets. It is part of Kautilya's larger commodity canvas, which includes coral (*pravālaka*) from Alakanda (Alexandria in Egypt) and Vivarna (probably somewhere on the Mediterranean coast), incense (*kāleyaka*) from Suvarnabhumi (some place in Southeast Asia), and silk cloth (*cīnapaṭṭa*) from China.[29] Parasamudra (across the sea) could be Sri Lanka; alternatively, given the fact that it is mentioned as a source of gems and aloe wood, it could refer to maritime Southeast Asia.

The king is central to the *Arthashastra:*

> The king and his rule; that is the essence of the constituent elements [of the state].[30]

Kautilya emphasizes the importance of high birth and a lineage of long standing, but his statement that the royal residence should be built on an excellent building site fit for the four *varṇas* to live on implies that the king could belong to any *varṇa.*[31] The list of excellences of the king is long and exhaustive and, apart from noble birth, includes being truthful, intelligent, a follower of dharma, grateful, faithful, generous, energetic, brave, resolute, possessed of a sense of shame, desirous of learning, and far-sighted. It also includes freedom from vices (*vyasanas*), passion, anger, greed, rigidity, fickleness, troublesomeness, and slanderousness.[32]

The prince's training should include study of the Veda, philosophy (*anvīkṣikī*), economics (*vārttā*), the science of politics (*daṇḍanīti*), the military arts, and history (*itihāsa*), which includes *dharmaśāstra* and *arthaśāstra.* Kautilya recommends that the prince should learn about economics from departmental heads (*adhyakṣas*) and about the science of politics from both theoreticians and practitioners.[33] Education and training are geared toward ensuring political paramountcy and the subjects' welfare.

> For the self-controlled king who is trained in the branches of knowledge and is intent on training his subjects enjoys unshared lordship over the earth, devoted to the welfare of all beings [*sarva-bhūta-hite rataḥ*].[34]

The last part of this statement reminds us of Ashoka.

The centrality of *vinaya* (which includes self-control, discipline, propriety, and modesty) for good governance and political success is indicated by the fact that it is the subject of the first book of the *Arthashastra. Vinaya* can be inborn or acquired through education. A successful king must be self-controlled (*ātmavat*). He must be free from anger and lust, and must have control over his senses.

> One lacking self-control and with defective constituent elements is either killed by the subjects or overcome by enemies, even if he is a ruler up to the four ends of the earth. But one who is controlled, even if his dominion is small, being associated with the excellences of the constituent elements and being learned in governance [*naya*], is victorious over the whole earth and never loses.[35]

Thus, Kautilya links the survival and expansion of the kingdom with the king's control over his senses.

The king also has an obligation to inculcate *vinaya* in his subjects, kin, and slaves. A self-controlled king endows the other elements of the state with excellences even if they are devoid of them. But one who is not endowed with self-control destroys the other elements, even if they are prosperous and devoted to him. The ideal king of the *Arthashastra* is the sage-like king (*rājarṣi*).[36] There are many differences in their words and ideas, especially in the content of their dharma, but both Ashoka and Kautilya see a close relationship between the king's governance of himself and his kingdom. What is new in the *Arthashastra* is that it gives a pragmatic basis to the discussion of the king's duties, anchors them to the realization of his self-interest, and dispassionately and systematically discusses the use of force and violence in the political sphere.

Kautilya discusses the royal household and harem (*antargṛha*), and identifies queens and princes as sources of danger to the king.[37] He also discusses courtiers and court protocol—how courtiers should strive to fit into the court circle, be alert to the signs of the king's favor and disfavor, and try to rise above others in their lord's esteem.[38] He elaborates on the structure of a separate, complex, hierarchical bureaucratic sphere, based not on kinship but on function. In this elaboration, it is not the centralization of power that is emphasized, but the careful distribution and allocation of specific spheres of activities and duties to administrative officials who should be carefully chosen to discharge various functions, and the interconnectedness of the various tiers and elements of the administrative structure. Disguise, subterfuge, and surveillance are important elements in the glue that holds this structure together. The idea of fixed cash salaries for officials and even priests and kin indicates a mind that excelled in visualizing and expressing value in

monetary terms.

The king's activeness is essential for his success. If he is active, his servants and dependents will follow his example and also be active. A king who trusts in fate and is devoid of effort perishes because he does not start undertakings or because his undertakings have miscarried.[39] One who does whatever he pleases does not achieve anything and is the worst of all. Kautilya suggests a strenuous model daily timetable for the king, dividing his day and night into a total of sixteen parts, each consisting of one and a half hours.[40] Structure and discipline are emphasized, but there is flexibility regarding the precise nature of the structure. Kautilya understood information and communication as keys to effective governance. Receiving reports from secret agents figures three times in the model schedule, and Kautilya emphasizes the need to deal with urgent matters swiftly, without delay.

The *Arthashastra* has the idea of the subjects (*prajā, prakṛtayaḥ*) as a political collective. They are not listed separately among the constituent elements of the state, but are included in the *janapada.* The implicit standard subject of the *Arthashastra* is a free *ārya,* that is, a free citizen, belonging to one of the four *varṇa*s. The term *ārya* is variously contrasted with *mleccha* (barbarian), *dāsa* (slave), and *caṇḍāla* (untouchable), all of whom who lie outside the *ārya* fold. And yet, these groups, along with the forest people, are included in the category of the subjects, even if they are seen as lowly and problematic. They can be used by the state as spies and as military resources. Kautilya further breaks down the category of the subjects on the basis of *varṇa, āśrama,* and gender. He also makes a distinction between the standard subject and those who suffer from mental or physical disabilities, impotent men, outcastes, and those suffering from diseases such as leprosy. When it comes to specific situations when a person's precise social position has to be ascertained or declared, it is not *varṇa* but other bases of identity that are mentioned, such as name (*nāma*), country (*deśa*), caste (*jāti*), clan / family (*gotra*), and occupation (*karma*).[41] But there is also the idea of collectivities that cut across these distinctions—people of the city (*paura*) and those of the countryside (*jānapada*), and the compound term *paura-jānapada,* which is often used for the totality of the subjects.

Some of the statements made by Kautilya sound strikingly similar to those made by Ashoka:

> In the happiness of his subjects lies the happiness of the king, and his welfare [*hita*] lies in the welfare of his subjects. The king's welfare does not lie in what is pleasing [*priya*] to himself; his welfare lies in what is pleasing to his subjects."[42]

But while Ashoka understands dharma / dhamma in universal ethical terms, for Kautilya, the happiness of the subjects in this life and the next depends on their following their *varṇa* dharma. Kautilya distinguishes between the king's personal happiness and welfare and those of his subjects. But he also explains how the king's happiness and welfare (both in this and later lives) depend on ensuring the happiness and welfare of his subjects. While such benign statements may be found in many ancient texts, Kautilya's achievement was to demonstrate how following such a policy was in the political and material interests of the king. He linked the king's duty toward his subjects with the maintenance and augmentation of his power, and demonstrated how the calculated use of force was essential to this.

There is much discussion of the king's benevolence in the *Arthashastra.* Kautilya talks about the king's duty to protect his people and promote their welfare, and urges a paternalistic approach toward those in distress.[43] The king should look into the affairs of the gods, sects, learned Brahmanas, women, children, the aged, sick, distressed, and helpless. He should bestow gifts, maintain those without kin, and discipline slaves. He should come to the people's aid in difficult times such as famine and should construct irrigation works. Kautilya also visualizes the king as a protector and enhancer of the material resources of his realm by devoting special attention to forests, irrigation works, and mines.

An innovation in Kautilya's understanding of the subjects is that he recognizes them as an economic resource that can be enumerated, counted, and recorded. This is reflected in the idea of a census of people. The official known as the *gopa* should keep a record of the men and women in the group (of ten or forty families) according to their caste (*jāti*), clan (*gotra*), name (*nāma*), and occupation (*karma*), and also their income and expenditure.[44] The official known as the *samāhartṛ* should keep a record of the boundaries and assets of villages and their inhabitants according to *varṇa,* occupation, and animals owned, maintaining details of males and females, children and old people.[45] We know that a census of people (and animals) was

actually conducted in Ptolemaic Egypt,[46] so for the idea to have been known elsewhere in the ancient world is not surprising.

The duties of the king include protecting himself, his subjects, and the social order, and all these three things are interconnected.

> A king who fulfils his own dharma and protects his subjects according to dharma goes to heaven. For one who does not protect [them] or who inflicts unjust punishment [*mithyā-daṇḍa*], it is the reverse."[47]

The king's relationship with dharma is, above all, as protector of the social order based on *varṇa* and *āśrama*. By ensuring that people do not transgress this dharma, the king finds happiness in this life and after death.[48] In times of crisis, when dharmas are perishing, Kautilya also visualizes the king as a promulgator of dharma (*dharma-pravartaka*).[49]

Although the king is central to his political discourse, Kautilya's organic understanding of the state recognizes the importance of the other elements as well, and the general tenor of the *Arthashastra* is that the king must never act unilaterally without consultation. Kautilya's king is very powerful, but he is not a despot.

> Kingship can be carried out only with the help of associates. One wheel alone cannot turn [a cart or a chariot]. So he [the king] should appoint advisers [*sacivas*] and listen to their opinion.[50]

There is also a detailed discussion of the king's duties. Are there glimmers of a discourse of the rights of others, for instance those of the subjects, embedded deep in the discourse of duties? Perhaps, but barely so.

The most striking aspect of Kautilya's potential state is that it is an extremely intrusive one and this intrusiveness involves the use or the threat of force. The king moves people around like pawns on a chessboard, establishing settlements where none previously existed, balancing overflows of population from his own or other lands.[51] All conceivable aspects of economic and social life are overseen and regulated. State-owned land coexists with private property. The state is an entrepreneur, engaging not only in agriculture but also

commodity production in state-run factories.[52] Officials and spies fan out in all directions, regulating and watching the goings on in various parts of the kingdom.

This audacious vision of an omnipotent and omniscient state is contained in a text that seems to be grounded in solid Brahmanical social ideology. As in the Dharmashastra tradition (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the *Arthashastra* considers *varṇa* and *āśrama* as important bases of social organization and social identity. Among the *varṇa*s, the Brahmanas, especially those learned in the Veda, occupy an especially important and privileged position. And yet, the primacy Kautilya attached to productivity and profit necessitated a partial subversion of the ideal Brahmanical order. For instance, he suggests that new settlements should consist largely of Shudras, because he recognizes them as a productive resource that could be fruitfully exploited by the state. He expands their duties—in addition to serving the upper three *varṇa*s, they are also associated with livelihoods (*vārttā,* defined as consisting of agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade[53]) and with the professions of artisans and actors. This creates an overlap in the activities associated with Vaishyas and Shudras. Further, in Kautilya's opinion, Shudras can also be inducted into the army—another infringement of *varṇa* norms, which associate war exclusively with the Kshatriyas. So although Kautilya upholds Brahmanical privilege, in certain fundamental ways, he also undermines the Brahmanical vision of the *varṇa* order.

Kautilya advocates decisive, pragmatic political action and is not squeamish about the use of all force and killing that are necessary to protect the king and kingdom from internal and external enemies. And yet, he repeatedly strikes a note of caution. For instance, the king's three powers, which are the means to his success, are the power of counsel (*mantra-śakti*); the power of lordship, that is, military might (*prabhu-śakti*); and the power of energy (*utsāha-śakti*). Expressing his disagreement with the received wisdom of the experts, Kautilya first asserts the superiority of the power of military might over the power of energy; by winning over and purchasing men of energy, those possessed of military might—even women, children, and lame and blind persons—had succeeded in conquering the world.[54] But he goes on (again in opposition to other experts) to assert the superiority of the power of counsel over the power of military might:

> The power of counsel is superior. For the king with the eye of intelligence and the *śāstra* can take counsel with little effort and outwit enemies possessing energy and might by employing conciliation and other strategies and through secret and occult practices.[55]

Such an assertion of the primacy of the power of counsel undermines the use of brute force and goes against the idea of a totalitarian exercise of power.

This argument is further strengthened by Kautilya's discussion of the four expedients (*upāyas*): conciliation (*sāma*), making gifts (*dāna*), force (*daṇḍa*), and creating dissension (*bheda*). All these have to be used astutely, depending on the situation. In the context of dealing with a defeated king, Kautilya asserts that conciliation is the best policy, as it ensures that the defeated king will remain obedient to the *vijigīṣu*'s sons and grandsons. In fact, he warns against the use of excessive force against defeated kings (for instance, killing or imprisoning them, and coveting their land, property, sons, or wives), lest the circle of kings becomes frightened and rises to destroy the *vijigīṣu* and take his kingdom or his life.[56]

While Kautilya dilates on the path to political success, he also discusses the possibility of political failure. There are many possible sources of the threat of disorder in the kingdom. Kautilya's discussion of the calamities of the elements of the state is followed by discussion of afflictions, hindrances, and the stoppage of payments to the treasury—all of which the king has to prevent or contain for the sake of the land's prosperity.[57] Afflictions can be fated or those with unidentifiable causes, such as fire, flood, famine, disease, enemy attack, and strife within the royal family. The hindrances, which can be internal or external, include those caused by chiefs, enemies, and forest tribes.

While describing the ideal king, Kautilya is aware of the dangers that lie in the exercise of power. The positive enunciation of the king's duties is accompanied by warnings against excessive exploitation, especially through taxation:

> As from a garden, he should pluck fruits from the kingdom as they ripen. Out of fear of his own destruction, he should avoid [the plucking of] unripe fruits that leads to rebellion [*kopa-kāraka*].[58]

The anger and the disaffection of the subjects are discussed in detail. The implication is that the king should prevent such disaffection in his own interest, otherwise he will fall prey to violent insurrection. Morality is replaced by pragmatism.

The realities of flawed kingship emerge most vividly in Kautilya's discussion of the defects (*doṣas*) and even more so, the vices (*vyasanas*) to which kings fell prey.[59] Kautilya gives the etymology of *vyasana* as that which throws a person from his good or eminence. Depending on the context, the term *vyasana* can be broadly translated as "vice," "addiction," or "calamity." Kautilya's discussion of the king's *vyasanas* is part of a larger discourse on *vyasanas* of the elements of the state as well as of all human beings. The human *vyasanas* stem from a lack of knowledge or self-control and are classified into those arising from anger and those arising from lust.[60] The four royal *vyasanas* in ancient Indian political thought are drinking (*mada*), gambling (*dyūta*), womanizing (*strī*), and hunting

(*mṛgayā*), and the theorists had different views on their relative demerits.[61] Kautilya disagrees with all other authorities. He disagrees vehemently with those who suggest that princes should be kept engrossed in pleasure so that they do not pose a threat to the king, as well as with those who suggest that they should be tempted with one of the four vices by secret agents to ascertain their loyalty. According to him, these are very dangerous strategies.[62] Instead, he advocates ways of creating abhorrence toward the vices in princes.[63]

In the discussion of the relative seriousness of the royal vices, the sequence of listing (hunting, gambling, womanizing, drinking) seems to be in ascending order of reprehensibility—that is, hunting is the least problematic and drinking the most problematic.[64] However, in one place, this order gets disturbed. Comparing gambling with drinking, Kautilya states that gambling is worse than drinking, especially in the case of oligarchies and royal families having the oligarchic characteristics, because gambling leads to dissension and destruction. Therefore, Kautilya asserts, gambling is the most evil among vices as it favors evil men and since it leads to evil in administration. This clearly applies specifically to oligarchies or polities with oligarchic features. The aim of the king should be to keep free from vices and to become one who has attained victory over his senses (*jitendriya*).[65]

Kautilya's detailed discussion of the justice system reflects a heightened recognition of the need for the use of carefully calculated force and violence by the state against its subjects. As in other ancient Indian texts, so in the *Arthashastra,* the word *daṇḍa* has many different connotations. Apart from its literal meaning—rod or stick—it can, depending on the context, imply punishment, justice, force, fines, the army, and injury (verbal and physical). Kautilya's king holds up the rod, ever ready to strike. The maintenance of worldly life depends on *daṇḍanīti* (the administration of *daṇḍa*), which, by extension, is the science of politics. According to Kautilya, the purpose of *daṇḍa* is the protection of the people belonging to the four *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s —here to be understood as referring to society as a whole.[66] The idea that the king's force is essential in order to punish criminals, prevent social violence, and maintain the social order is present in the epics. But Kautilya discusses these procedures in unprecedented detail.

Brahmanical texts frequently refer to the threat of social disorder, which is seen as having disastrous political implications. The idea of the mixture of varṇas (*varṇa-saṁkara*) refers to the transgression of *varṇa* norms in relation to occupation and marriage. A frequently used metaphor to describe the state of chaos that will prevail if the king does not use *daṇḍa* is *mātsya-nyāya* (the law of the fish)—the big fish will devour the smaller fish.[67] In this warning of the dangers of brutal and oppressive social conflict, the king's *daṇḍa* (force and justice) is the single factor that prevents the world from collapsing into complete anarchy. But Kautilya is not a votary of the unbridled use of force or punishment. Expressing his disagreement with other experts, he asserts that the king who is severe with the rod becomes a source of terror to all beings, while one who is excessively mild is despised. Impartial behavior (*vṛtti-sāmya*) is one of the important qualities of the king. If the rod is used unjustly, through passion, anger, or contempt, *daṇḍa* becomes dangerous. The king's force and his punishment must be rooted in discipline (*vinaya*); it is only then that it brings prosperity to all living beings.[68]

The king does not have a major direct role in the nitty-gritty of litigation discussed in Books 3 and 4 of the *Arthashastra.* But whether administered directly by the king or by judges, punishment is seen as having both social and political aspects. Kautilya has sections dealing

with *vyavahāra* and *kaṇṭakaśodhana*. *Vyavahāra* refers to transactions between two parties. It includes marriage, inheritance, property disputes, encroachment, damage, debt, deposits, slaves and laborers, sale, gifts, forcible seizure, verbal and physical injury, and betting and gambling.[69] Generally, one of the two parties has to take the matter to a court where the trial is conducted by three judges known as *dharmasthas*. Most of the crimes in this category invite fines. *Kaṇṭakaśodhana* (literally, "the removal of thorns") refers to the punishment of those guilty of various criminal offenses, and these cases are decided by three judges known as *pradeṣṭṛs*. The punishments include fines, torture, mutilation, and capital punishment. It has been suggested that in the *Arthashastra,* the term *kaṇṭakaśodhana* refers to both policing and adjudicating criminal offenses.[70]

The main focus is on the nature of the crime, investigation, and punishment, which must be meted out on the basis of a consideration of the entire concatenation of factors—the social status of the parties involved and the nature and degree of seriousness of the offense, as well as motive, time, place, and consequences.[71] The *varṇa* of the defendant, complainant, and other individuals involved is a key element in deciding on the appropriate punishment for many offenses. Brahmanas, especially those learned in the Veda, are seen as belonging to a community with special legal privileges. The most violent punishments related to *varṇa* pertain to defilement, injury, and sexual transgression. Thus, Kautilya suggests that a Shudra having sexual relations with a Brahmana woman should be burnt in a straw fire.[72] Such transgressions invite drastic punishment and public spectacle because they are considered threatening to the social order. And yet, according to Kautilya, great care must be taken to ensure that punishment is meted out justly. The king who inflicts wrongful punishment cannot escape punishment himself.[73]

The *Arthashastra* contains the earliest expression of a legal code in India. It indicates the state's role in systematizing, developing, and enforcing *vyavahāra* in the sense of public transactional law.[74] Kautilya gives primacy to the royal edict (*raja-śāsana*) among the four legal domains, the other three "feet" being dharma, *vyavahāra* (laws related to legal transactions, many of them connected with commerce), and *caritra* (custom).[75] Apart from reflecting the early history of jurisprudence in India, this represents a significant development in the ideology of kingship. Punishment, and the force

and violence inherent in punishment, were recognized as an important part of governance and politics and were considered in detail with sophistication.

While the job of dispensing justice is discussed largely in the context of judges, in a few places, there is mention of the king. We are told that when the king carries out his dharma and protects his subjects, he goes to heaven; when he does not protect them and metes out unjust punishment (*mithyā-daṇḍa*), he suffers the reverse (that is, goes to hell). The king also figures in Kautilya's discussion of disputes over landed property, as the fixer of boundaries when they have become unclear, and as the recipient of landed property when the claims of two parties are both rejected or when the owner has disappeared. He is the beneficiary of other objects when the claims over them cannot be decided because of witnesses giving different testimony, and is the recipient of the surplus amount mentioned by witnesses if they testify to a larger amount being at stake than that reported by the plaintiff. A summons from the king is a means whereby the defendant or plaintiff can produce witnesses who are located far away or are reluctant to make an appearance. The king is also advised to use punishment as a means of keeping his officials and subjects honest and upright.[76] So although the king is spoken of as the wielder of the rod of just punishment in a general way (similar to the description of the king as lord of the land), in a few places, he is connected with more specific aspects of legal procedure.

The *Arthashastra* asserts the state's right to impose retribution, pain, and torture on subjects in the cause of justice and is known for its detailed prescription of numerous punishments, often harsh and violent. Kautilya's aim seems to be to enumerate and give a scale of relative value to crimes and punishments. The types of punishment include fines, confiscation of property, and exile. There are also what we would consider violent punishments such as corporeal punishment, mutilation, branding, torture, forced labor, and death, sometimes involving public spectacle. Kautilya accepts torture as a means of acquiring information during interrogation for crimes.[77] The text distinguishes between investigation or interrogation through verbal means (*vākya*) and through action (*karman*). The latter refers to torture, and this is prescribed only if guilt is probable and not for trifling offenses or for certain categories of people—minors, the aged, sick, weak, intoxicated, insane; pregnant women; and those overcome by hunger, thirst, or travel. Torture is also prescribed as a form of

punishment. Women are to be given only half of the due torture; or they should be examined by verbal interrogation. Learned Brahmanas and ascetics are also not to be tortured. Kautilya lists the different types of torture, including those that involve striking, whipping, caning, suspension from a rope, and inserting needles under the nails. He insists on a strict regulation of the torture regime, suggesting that torture should be administered only on alternative days and only once a day. Punishment is prescribed for the use of torture by the superintendent of a prison house, presumably when it was not warranted.[78]

Fines dominate the *Arthashastra* and are prescribed for all manner of offenses, including domestic issues such as a wife going out at night, withholding conjugal rights, or not opening the door to her husband. There is frequent mention of a three-level scale—the lowest (*pūrva*), middle (*madhyama*), and highest (*uttama*)—of fines for violence (*sāhasa-daṇḍa*).[79] It is no coincidence that fines happen to be the most profitable kind of punishment for the state. Another example of Kautilya's preoccupation with production and pecuniary benefit to the state in his discussion of punishment is his suggestion that officials who fail all tests of loyalty can be put to work in mines, material forests, elephant forests, and factories, thus turning these into sites for productive punishment.[80] The most brutal of the *Arthashastra* prescriptions relate to punishments involving mutilation, amputation, torture, and the death penalty. The principle of *lex talionis* is applied in certain cases. Inflicting pain, disfigurement, and capital punishment are seen as part of legitimate punishment.[81]

In its discussion of capital punishment, the *Arthashastra* asserts the state's right to take life on the grounds of justice. It distinguishes between simple death (*ghāta / śuddha-vadha*) and death by torture (*citroghāta / citra-vaddha*).[82] The latter refers to especially painful deaths, which may also have involved public spectacle and public example. The death penalty is prescribed for causing grievous injury or death, with the variety of capital punishment depending on the severity of the assault and the time between the assault and death, and whether or not there was some mitigating circumstance. Thus, death by torture is the punishment for assault that results in instant death; while simple death is the punishment for assault that results in death within seven days.[83] Apart from human beings, this penalty also applies to killing or inciting someone to kill horses or elephants or herd animals belonging to the king. The different kinds of death that

are included in death by torture are the following: burning on a pyre, drowning in water, cooking in a big jar, impaling on a stake, setting fire to different parts of the body, and tearing apart by bullocks. Death by setting fire to the different parts of the body is mentioned frequently.

Although *varṇa* is central to Kautilya's understanding of society and law, crimes that attract the death penalty are often discussed *without* reference to the *varṇa* of the parties involved.[84] Most of these have to do with the king or the state. Simple death is prescribed as punishment for various crimes that involve cheating the king or the state—for instance robbing the treasury; using the king's jewels; embezzling or misappropriating funds; killing an animal that belongs to the king's herd; killing or stealing a horse, elephant, or chariot that belongs to the king; and stealing army weapons.[85] Similarly, in the discussion of sexual crimes, where the *varṇa*s of the two parties are generally crucial determinants of the severity of the transgression and the nature of the punishment, a man having sexual relations with the king's wife (apparently regardless of his *varṇa* status) is to be awarded death by being cooked in a jar.[86] This indicates that subjects were considered equal when it came to crimes against the king and state.

A most gory punishment—setting fire to the hands and head of the perpetrator—is suggested for one who covets the kingdom, attacks the palace, incites forest people or enemies, or foments rebellion in the fortified city, kingdom, or the army. There is a *varṇa*-related caveat—a Brahmana is to be made to "enter darkness" (perhaps blinded) and not killed, for such crimes.[87] But in general, violence against the state invites the most violent punishments.

It is interesting to note that in many instances, Kautilya refers to the possibility of commuting punishments to fines. In almost all cases where mutilation is recommended, it can be substituted by a fine.[88] But unless there is some crucial mitigating circumstance, no commutation is possible where the crime merits the death penalty, especially in cases of treason or loss to the state, or especially exceptionally reprehensible acts (such as selling human flesh). Again, in tune with Kautilya's eye for the state's opportunity for gain in every situation, there are many references to men sentenced to death being used as couriers in dangerous, risky assignments.[89] The rationale seems to be that since they are going to die soon anyway, the state should take maximum advantage before the execution of the sentence.

While Kautilya's discussion of legal proceedings refers to various

kinds of judges, with the king stepping in only occasionally, the state is directly involved in the incarceration of prisoners.[90] Ashoka's inscriptions give us the earliest references to prisons. The *Arthashastra* indicates a significant development in the idea of the prison, and this may have corresponded to a further development of the actual institution. As the text does not discuss prison sentences as a type of punishment, it is possible that prisons housed a variety of persons including those whose trial was awaited or underway, those undergoing interrogation or torture; those unable to pay fines imposed on them, and those awaiting their sentence or punishment (including death). There is an official in charge of prisons (*bandhanāgārādhyakṣa*). The text distinguishes between prisons associated with the *dharmasthīya* and *mahāmātra* officials, probably referring to separate ones for those convicted of civil and criminal offenses. Within these, Kautilya recommends separate sections for men and women and urges that adequate arrangements should be made for well-guarded courtyards to prevent the escape of prisoners.[91] He also distinguishes between the temporary lock-up (*cāraka*) and prison (*bandhanāgāra*).[92] The punishments for letting prisoners escape from the latter were greater and went up to death. Kautilya recommends the periodic infliction of corporeal punishment on prisoners as an instrument of chastisement. But he is also aware of the need to protect them from the cruel or violent actions of jailors and other prisoners such as torture, maiming, depriving them or food and water, and the rape of women prisoners.[93]

The fact that the officer known as the *saṁnidhātṛ* is told to build a treasury, warehouse, magazine, storehouse for forest produce, armory and a prison house (all in the same breath) should alert us to Kautilya's understanding of the prison as more than a site for punishment. He sees the prison as a source of labor and hence an economic resource for the state, and those convicted of capital crimes had special value. This is clear from the already mentioned reference to convicts who had been given the death penalty being used to perform dangerous tasks for the state. In fact, in the *Arthashastra,* the productive and pecuniary potential of prisons seems to outweigh their role in punishment. Kautilya recommends a periodic (daily or every five days) clearing out of prisoners from prisons by putting them to work or by letting them go in return for cash ransom.

Kautilya also envisages prisoners as objects in the king's ceremonial display of benevolence. He recommends that on the king's birth

asterism and full moon days, there should be a periodic release of children and old, sick, or helpless persons; pious prisoners or those bound by an agreement could be released for a ransom. (The reference to children in prisons is striking.) And when a new territory is acquired, a crown prince installed, or a son born to the king, all prisoners should be released.[94] While this reminds us of Ashoka's pillar edict 5, Kautilya's discussion of the prison is much more elaborate in terms of overall conceptualization as well as detail.

The state of the *Arthashastra* is a perpetrator, controller as well as a target of violence. Kautilya dissects, classifies, and discusses force, injury, and violence in the political and social spheres in unprecedented, meticulous detail. Although the term *hiṁsā* is often used for injury, in the detailed discussion of causing injury and the punishments for such crimes, the term generally used is *pāruṣya.* Kautilya distinguishes between verbal injury (*vāk-pāruṣya)*) and physical injury (*daṇḍa-pāruṣya*).[95] It is interesting that he talks about physical injury not only to humans but also to animals (as well as plants). However, there is a difference in attitude: While human life is considered to have a value in itself (although there is a gradation in this value depending on social status), the value of animals lies largely in their being private property of the subjects and politically and economically valuable commodities for the king. This is why they have to be protected against injury, theft, and killing. The treatment of animals in the *Arthashastra* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The term *ahiṁsā* has a positive value in the *Arthashastra* and occurs in the context of the general code of ethics applicable to all (that is, to all *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s) as well as to the king. It heads the list of the duties common to all—nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), purity (*śauca*), freedom from malice (*anasūyā*), compassion (*ānṛśaṁsya*), and forbearance (*kṣamā*).[96] Elsewhere, Kautilya states that with his senses under control, the sage-like king (*rājarṣi*) should avoid violence (*hiṁsā*) as well as coveting another man's wife or property.[97] This may sound hypocritical considering the innumerable places where he advocates ruthless action involving injuring and killing others. But in actuality, there is no contradiction because Kautilya sanctions, and in fact whole-heartedly advocates and supports, all measures that are required for the king to maintain and enhance his political power. And while the text recommends many acts that are necessary to maintain the king's power, it simultaneously defines the limits of the use of force and lays down the negative consequences of transgressing these limits. The force that is wanton, unnecessary, and not conducive to the maintenance and furthering of political power is violence and must be avoided.

Kautilya is extremely concerned with threats of violence against the

king. Allies and kinsmen are often grouped together; they are part of the king's party and give him strength. But the *Arthashastra* is keenly aware of the danger presented by members of the royal household, especially disloyal queens and disaffected, rebellious princes.

> A king can protect his kingdom only when he is himself protected from those close to him and from his enemies, first of all, from his wives and sons.[98]

The heir apparent, the king's mother and chief queen stand at the top of Kautilya's salary schedule for members of the royal household. Their generous salary of 48,000 *paṇas* (silver coins) not only indicates their eminent place in the hierarchy of status within the royal household but also their great susceptibility to instigation and revolt.[99] Kautilya warns the king to take great care while in his inner apartments and to guard himself from the violent designs of queens and princes. There is a classification of different types of sons and wives, and we are told that the king's beloved is more dangerous than the prince. Kautilya recommends a very high level of regulation and vigilance over all comings and goings in the palace, especially the harem.[100]

The harem and the royal household are linked to political succession and transition. Kautilya distinguishes between legitimate (*jātya*) and illegitimate (*ajātya*) heirs and pretenders to the throne. Succession is generally patrilineal, and primogeniture is approved of, except in the case of a calamity. In normal circumstance, the daughter is not considered an heir. But the emphasis is on the selection of an heir possessing good qualities. According to Kautilya, if an only son is undisciplined or stupid, he should not be made king. In the absence of a worthy son, he advises the elevation of a minor prince who is not addicted to vices, or a princess, or a pregnant queen, under the guidance of high officers. He also speaks of regents. On the death or imminent death of the king, the responsibility for ensuring the continuance of the kingdom and sole sovereignty falls to the minister (*amātya*); in contrast to Bharadvaja, Kautilya does not approve of the minister himself grabbing power in such a delicate situation.[101]

Apart from ensuring a smooth transition to a worthy successor, the problems of kingship include dissensions among the princes and army commanders, which can lead to violent rebellion. If a king's treasury

is empty, the army will defect or kill him.[102] There is the danger of different types of conspiracies in the outer and inner regions, and Kautilya discusses ways of conciliating and crushing them. There can be an uprising of ministers in the interior and other regions. Of inner and outer revolts (*kopa*), the former are more serious, and a rising of ministers of the interior is more serious than a rising in the interior. Royal favorites (*vallabhas*) can also become a threat to the king and the kingdom.[103]

The king can become a victim of his subjects' violence. For Kautilya, the subjects do not form a passive collective. Their loyalty or disaffection is an important element in the discussion of governance and of interstate relations. Some people remain dissatisfied despite the use of the stratagems of gifts, pacification, and creating dissension.[104] There are many references to revolts of rebellious subjects and to kings killed in such uprisings. The anger of the subjects (*prakṛti-kopa, janapada-kopa*) is something to be avoided at all cost. Disaffected subjects (*virakta-prakṛti*) or rebellious subjects (*apacarita-prakṛti*) who are not loyal to their king weaken his power.

> When he is attacked, the subjects help a king who behaves justly but is suffering from a serious calamity; they remain indifferent to one who behaves unjustly and is suffering from a light calamity; but if they are disaffected, they destroy even a powerful king.[105]

The causes of disaffection of the subjects include their being impoverished, which leads to greed. Disaffected subjects will rise in revolt when there is an enemy attack. The converse of disaffected subjects are loyal ones, and Kautilya emphasizes the importance of the subjects' love (*anurāga*) toward the king.[106] He has already pointed out that the happiness and welfare of the king is dependent on that of his subjects. Therefore, a weak king should try to strengthen his power by ensuring the welfare of his subjects.[107] His survival depends on it.

Kautilya's king uses force to protect himself against the violence of others. "Silent punishment" (*upāṁśu-daṇḍa, tūṣṇīm daṇḍa*) refers to inflicting death decisively, swiftly, and secretly on those guilty of treason or on enemies who cannot be killed openly. (This is not part of the discussion of standard judicial procedure and is discussed in a separate section.) Silent punishment is recommended for treasonable

principal officers who harm the kingdom, but being favorites or being united, cannot be killed openly.[108] It can be used by the king on seditious members of his own circle or the enemy's side. Silent punishment can also be used by the king against his own people; it is one of the recommended strategies for dealing with subjects who have turned hostile.[109]

Kautilya's discussion of statecraft goes a long way toward liberating politics from dharma. Although he makes all the right noises about dharma and describes the king as protector of *varṇāśrama dharma,* by raising *artha* to the status of the preeminent goal of human activity, Kautilya's discourse actually undermines that dharma. Kautilya is unequivocal in his position that that if there is a conflict between dharma and *artha,* the latter must prevail. The duties of the king are disengaged from the moral domain and are grounded in pragmatic self-interest. All this is accomplished through a detailed discussion of a vast range of issues related to different aspects of statecraft, reasoned argument, and the explanation of different alternative paths of action and their likely consequences. The *Arthashastra* discusses force and violence in the political sphere in unprecedented detail, dilating on the king's role as their perpetrator, controller, and target. But Kautilya's king is not a totalitarian despot. He is a powerful, ambitious ruler who stands at the center of a complex web of personal, bureaucratic, and political relationships, one who makes careful choices after deliberation and consultation, keeping in mind his political interests.[110]

The fact that Kautilya does not discuss the source of the king's authority can be understood as a part of his lack of interest in discussing abstruse issues, but this silence also indicates that he was interested in the here and now and on de facto power. And yet, for all his hard-headed this-worldly pragmatism, Kautilya's political economy seems to extend beyond this world to future worlds. Carrying out his duties and protecting his people according to dharma leads to the king's *attainment of heaven;* if he fails to protect them or inflicts unjust punishment, hell awaits him.[111]*Artha* is described as the means for the acquisition and protection of this world *and the next.*[112] This suggests that the connection between metaphysical concerns and realpolitik is weakened in the *Arthashastra,* but not completely broken. Or, as is more likely, Kautilya was just paying lip service to widely accepted beliefs.

The *Manusmriti:* The King as Deity and Punisher

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the discipline of Dharmashastra, devoted to an explication and discussion of dharma, was invented during circa 600–300 BCE. Dharmashastra consisted of three types of texts: Dharmasutras, Smritis, and the commentarial texts, which followed each other sequentially. The Dharmashastra works are often described as "law books." However, as should be apparent by now, the concept of dharma is not equivalent to the western notion of law. These authoritative normative texts include what seem to be legal prescriptions related to civil and criminal issues, but they were not restricted to such issues. It is also unclear to what extent their prescriptions were used in actual legal cases, in which local custom must have played an important role. The overall focus of Dharmashastra was how individuals should live their lives according to Brahmanical dharma; *varṇa, āśrama,* and gender constituted the principal bases of this normative social discourse.

The earliest texts of this discipline, the Dharmasutras, do not deal in detail with kingship, but the later ones, such as the *Manavasharmashastra,* also known as the *Manusmriti,* does.[113] This indicates an acute recognition on the part of the dharma experts of the important role of the institution of kingship in maintaining the Brahmanically prescribed social order. The *Manusmriti* has usually been dated between circa 200 BCE and 200 CE; a recent assessment places it in the second–third centuries CE.[114] The *Manusmriti* coopted several issues and concepts from the domain of *arthaśāstra,* and there is evidence of clear borrowing from the *Arthashastra* in its discussion of kingship, administration, and civil and criminal law.[115] Like the *Arthashastra,* the *Manusmriti* also enjoys a certain notoriety. It is often seen as an upholder of the oppression of lower classes and women, but it is actually a complex text that defies simplistic characterization. It contains a variety of ideas as well as many contradictory statements that have to be understood in the specific context in which they are made. The *Manusmriti* is composed in verse and consists of twelve books. Here we will focus on the political ideas in the text, especially Books 7 and 8, with special reference to the ideas regarding the king's use of punishment and violence.

Book 7 of the *Manusmriti* begins with Manu telling the assembled

seers that he will explain the dharmas of kings (*rājadharmāḥ*)—how a king should conduct himself, how he came into being, and how he can attain the highest success (*siddhi*).[116] The king's foremost duties are to protect his people and maintain the social order based on *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Like the *Mahabharata,* the *Manusmriti* has a long discussion of "dharmas in time of emergency" (*āpad-dharma*). It lays down the norm but is prepared to accept certain departures from that norm. The king of the *Manusmriti* is a consecrated Kshatriya. In times of emergency, a Brahmana is permitted to earn his living by following the dharma of the Kshatriya,[117] but that is an exception, not the norm.

The *Manusmriti* frequently asserts the supremacy of the Brahmana over the king. Between the king's power and that of the Brahmana, Manu tells us that the latter is much stronger. A Brahmana can strike down his enemy by using the powerful Atharvaveda.[118] Kings must honor and serve the Brahmanas and must give to them generously. And yet, although Brahmanas are described as preeminent among the recipients of a king's gift, such gifts are also described as being reprehensible to them. Subsisting on gleaning (*uñcha*), that is, gathering grain, is superior to accepting gifts.[119] This reminds us of the similar importance attached to the vow of gleaning in the *Mahabharata*.

The king, Manu informs us, is not a human being but a great deity in human form. This should be understood as the Dharmashastra experts' attempt to exalt the institution of kingship, rather than as a theory of the divinity of kings. In a kingless world where people were running in all directions in fear, the lord created kings in order to protect the world. He did so by extracting the eternal particles from the eight guardian deities and fashioning them into the king.

> Like the sun, indeed, he burns eyes and minds; no one on earth can bear to gaze upon him. He is Fire, he is Wind, he is the Sun, he is the Moon, he is the King of the Law (Yama), he is Kubera, he is Varuna, and he is the great Indra—by reason of his power.[120]

The king overpowers all beings on account of his luster and energy (*tejas*). Even if he is a mere child, he must never be treated with disrespect. A fire, if approached recklessly, burns only that single man, but the fire that is the king burns him along with his family, livestock,

and wealth. The goddess of prosperity resides in the king's favor, victory lies in his valor, death in his anger. The king can destroy; hence he should be feared. His decree should not be transgressed by anyone. All this constitutes a powerful statement about the king's enormous potential for violence.

The description of the king's blazing power and terrible anger are followed by a discussion of his punishment—a description that is much more intense and detailed than that of the *Arthashastra.* In fact, in the *Manusmriti,* the king appears above all as a stern policer and punisher. Manu asserts that the lord created his son Daṇḍa (punishment) from the energy of Brahman for the sake of the king. It is fear of the king's punishment that makes all creatures follow their dharma. The text then goes on to sign paeans to punishment:

> Punishment [*daṇḍa*] is the king; he is the male; he is the leader; he is the ruler.... Punishment disciplines all the subjects, Punishment alone protects them, and Punishment watches over them as they sleep—the wise declare that Punishment is Dharma.[121]

The relationship between punishment and order is emphasized in a manner similar to that in the *Mahabharata.* Men are generally dishonest. If punishment did not exist, the strong would grill the weak like fish on a spit; crows would devour the sacrificial cakes; dogs would lap up the sacrificial offerings; nobody would have any rights of ownership; everything would be turned upside down. If punishment was not properly administered, the *varṇas* would become corrupted, all boundaries would be breached, and there would be a revolt (*prakopa*) of all the people. Where punishment, dark-skinned and red-eyed, moves about killing sinners, there the subjects do not go astray, as long as the king is discerning.[122] The necessity of the king's punishment of his people for the maintenance of the social order is affirmed and emphasized.

It is clear that *daṇḍa* refers to punishment that is just; it can be wielded only by one who is self-possessed, not by one who is foolish, greedy, irresolute, or attached to the objects of the senses. The king's punishment must be proper (*samyak*). The ruler who administers proper punishment must be wise, honest, and truthful, one who keeps his word, who acts after careful examination and in accordance with

the *śāstra*s, and who understands dharma, *artha,* and *kāma.* Echoing Kautilya, Manu advises the king to wield the rod of punishment properly, and to be both harsh and gentle.[123] Just punishment sustains order; unjust punishment not only leads to disorder, it can kill the king, along with his kin.[124]

But apart from such general and expected pronouncements on the king and punishment, Manu's discussion of lawsuits also gives the king a more specific and proactive role than what we see in the *Arthashastra.* This text refers to the king regularly attending to law suits. If he tires of hearing them himself, he can appoint a minister (*amātya*) who is well-born, wise, self-controlled, and a knower of dharma in his place.[125] Chapter 8 of the *Manusmriti,* which deals with the administration of justice, mentions the king very frequently. Often using the term "dharma" for justice, Manu presents the king as a judge in civil and criminal litigation, examining and deliberating over the evidence, making and pronouncing judgments, and executing punishment. We are told that the king should hear cases every day, and should enter the assembly hall (*sabhā*) dressed modestly, accompanied by Brahmanas and counselors who are well-versed in policy. He should decide on cases in accordance with the norms of the country and the *śāstra*s. He can also appoint a learned Brahmana in his place.[126] The king must be self-controlled, dispassionate, and honest in discharging his duties as a dispenser of justice. While hearing cases, he must use reason and be attentive to all the details of the evidence, tracking down the truth as a hunter tracks down an animal from its trail of blood.[127] Manu excels in using violent imagery while talking about the king's justice.

Manu races through various issues related to administration, such as the qualities of good counselors (*sacivas*) and other officials (*amātyas*), the governance of towns and villages, and the royal chaplain (*purohita*) and priests who officiate at royal sacrifices. He recognizes the need for a good surveillance system. All this is discussed very briefly compared to the *Arthashastra.* Taxation is the king's reward for protecting the people. The *Manusmriti* talks about the desirability of moderate taxation and urges the king to have a paternalistic attitude toward his people.

> He should not cut off his own root and that of others through too much greed, for by cutting off his own root, he harms both

himself and others.[128]

Like the *Arthashastra,* the *Manusmriti* gives a daily time-table for the king (though not in the hour-by-hour fashion of the former) and tries rather unsuccessfully to squeeze most of its discussion of governance into that framework. Like many other authorities, Manu emphasizes discipline (*vinaya*), citing examples of legendary kings who flourished or were destroyed due to their possession or lack of this quality.[129] A king must be self-controlled (*ātmavān*). Controlling the senses is essential for controlling the subjects. The dangers of addiction to vices arising from pleasure and anger are underlined, and greed is said to lie at the root of both. Manu lists drinking, gambling, womanizing, and hunting as the four worst vices stemming from pleasure; and physical assault, verbal abuse, and plunder as the three worst vices stemming from anger. Among this set of seven, he asserts that each preceding vice is worse than the one that follows. This suggests that he considered drinking as the worst royal vice, followed in descending order of reprehensibility by gambling, womanizing, and hunting.[130]

The *Manusmriti* discusses violence and nonviolence and some of this discussion relates to animal sacrifice. For instance, Manu asserts that apparent violence in sacrifice is not really violence.[131] Nonviolence features in the rationale given for the performance of the five great sacrifices (*pañca-mahāyajñas*). The issue of nonviolence also turns up in the context of dietary prescriptions, and there is ambivalence here: Brahmanas should not eat meat, but meat is included in the list of foods to be offered to them at the funerary feast known as the *śrāddha.*

In its discussion of dharma in times of emergency, the *Manusmriti* suggests that if a Brahmana or Kshatriya is reduced to following the dharma of a Vaishya, he should avoid practicing agriculture, because it involves injuring living beings (*hiṁsā*) and dependence on others (ploughs, animals, landlords, labor?).

> Some people consider agriculture wholesome, yet this occupation is condemned by the good [because] the iron-tipped plough destroys the earth along with the creatures living in it.[132]

We see here an unexpected similarity with Buddhist and Jaina views that connect agriculture with violence.

While exalting the king and his punishment, the *Manusmriti* also

warns of the dangerous consequence of his oppression. (Interestingly, the verb for “to oppress,” *kṛṣ,* also means to plough or to cultivate):

> As a weeder plucks the weeds and protects the corn, so the king should protect his realm and kill his adversaries. When a king in his folly oppresses his own realm indiscriminately, he is soon deprived of his kingdom and his life, along with his relatives. As living beings destroy their lives by oppressing their bodies, so kings too destroy their lives by oppressing their realms.[133]

Bhasa: The Epics and the Political in Early Sanskrit Drama

The early centuries CE saw the birth of a new textual genre—*kāvya,* or literature—which included poetry, prose, and drama. The origins of this genre have been traced variously to epic poetry or to the tradition of the one-line stanza (*muktaka*), which is found in the Buddhist *Tipitaka* and in early Prakrit poetry.[134] The emergence and development of *kāvya* was accompanied by works on poetics and dramaturgy, the earliest extant one being the *Natyashastra.* Sheldon Pollock has perceptively drawn attention to the close relationship between kingship and *kāvya.*[135] These connections cannot be denied, but we should note at least two things. First, the birth of *kāvya* took place several centuries after the emergence and development of monarchical states, in fact, well after the emergence of India's first empire. Second, although kings were major patrons of literature and royal courts an important locus of literary activity, they were not the only ones.

Political theorists dealt with political issues directly, while litterateurs dealt with them within the conventions and idiom of their own genre, weaving in aesthetics and emotion. Poetry and drama were meant to entertain and enthrall, and the aesthetic and narrative elements of *kāvya* made it a powerful medium for the transmission and dissemination of ideas related to political power and political violence. The works of Bhasa and Ashvaghosha represent the earliest surviving Sanskrit *kāyva,* and it is to the former that we first turn.

Testimony to Bhasa's literary reputation is found in the writings of many ancient Indian writers and literary theorists, but his actual works were unknown till 1909, when T. Ganapati Sastri, the curator of the manuscripts library of Thiruvananthapuram discovered the palm-leaf manuscripts of thirteen plays—twelve complete and one incomplete.[136] Bhasa probably lived in the late second century.[137] His plays are marked by a great deal of brisk, dramatic action. In line with the later Sanskrit dramatic tradition, they are bilingual—male, higher-status characters usually speak in Sanskrit; lower status characters and women speak in a Prakrit dialect. But in sharp contrast to the later Sanskrit dramatic tradition, in which tragedy is absent, two of Bhasa's plays (the *Urubhanga* and *Karnabhara*) can be described as tragedies.

The plays usually end with a benedictory verse that alludes to a king, in several cases referred to as "Rajasimha" (lion king).[138]

Political conflict and violence feature in many of Bhasa's plays. Contested kingship dominates, and there is a special focus on the royal household and the harem. One of the plays is based on the Krishna legend, six are related with the *Mahabharata* story, two with the *Ramayana,* and two with a legendary king named Udayana.[139] Most of the action takes place in capital cities—Ayodhya, Lanka, Kishkindha, Ujjayini, and Kaushambi. And yet, the characters in the political plays also include nonelite individuals who are given (sometimes very long) speaking parts—cowherds, soldiers, a burglar, a shampooer, and women servants of the harem. Bhasa lets the social underdog speak. Further, the clownish character of the Brahmana *vidūśaka* (who features in the plays not based on epic themes) introduces social satire, with Brahmanas as its prime target.

There are two kinds of kings in Bhasa's plays. One operates in the human realm and deals with human predicaments in human ways. The other has divine elements and performs miracles and superhuman feats.[140] The idealization of kingship (and of the conduct of members of the royal household) is most visible in the *Ramayana*-based plays. The attributes of the great king are sketched with greatest detail in the delineation of Rama's personality, which is very similar to that in the Valmiki *Ramayana.* But Bhasa introduces some raw edges. In the *Pratima,* there is a critique of Rama, which comes from his arch enemy, Ravana. After praising Rama's strength, prowess, spirit, and speed, Ravana describes Rama as

> "a matchless warrior whose wits have been dulled by his conceit."[141]

Bhasa's political dramas refer to a range of administrative officials, royal attendants, spies, and messengers. Ministers (referred to as *mantrin, amātya,* or *saciva*) play an especially important role. A minister named Yaugandharayana is the central character in two plays —the *Pratijnayaugandharayana* and *Svapnavasavadatta.* In fact, in the former, Udayana (the king of Vatsa) and his love interest, princess Vasantasena of Avanti, never ever appear on stage; their activities are only reported. The play is named after the protagonist, the minister Yaugandharayana, who is endowed with all the virtues necessary in

an ideal minister and who succeeds in fulfilling his vows. He is extraordinarily brave and loyal, and has love (*sneha*) and devotion (*svami-bhakti*) for his master. He is very well-informed of the goings on in the political sphere—he has already got a whiff of the plot being hatched against his king Udayana by the rival king Pradyota. The two ministers Yaugandharayana and Rumanvan disguise themselves and daringly venture into enemy territory in order to rescue their master—one disguised as a madman, the other as a Buddhist monk. The former masterminds Udayana's release from captivity as well as his escape and that of the princess with whom he has fallen in love. In the *Svapnavasavadatta,* too, the minister Yaugandharayana uses various strategies to safeguard the interests of king Udayana and the kingdom. As he muses, on him who carries the load of the king lies the load of all things.[142]

Although the minister's job involves great power and responsibility, Bhasa makes us aware that it also exposes him to great risk. In the *Avimaraka,* the minister Kaunjayana ruefully observes,

> "If works succeed, they say it is the greatness of the king
> And if they fail, it is no doubt the fault of the minister [*saciva*].
> It is nice to be known as a minister [*amātya*], but that unlucky man,
> Even though mighty and clever, is subtly punished by the king."[143]

The problems that figure in Bhasa's political plays include succession disputes, conflicts among collateral claimants, harem intrigues, and war and negotiation. Among the royal vices, Yudhishthira's well-known addiction to dice occurs in the *Pancharatra,* and the calamity in the *Pratijnayaugandharayana* arises due to king Udayana's desire to hunt an unusual prey—a legendary blue elephant. Primogeniture is considered the proper principle of succession, but it is evident that it is not well-established. Sita's remarks in the *Pratima* allude to court intrigues. When the drums for Rama's consecration suddenly fall silent, she remarks,

> "It is quite possible, the consecration ceremony may have been interrupted. So many things happen in royal families."[144]

She repeats the latter statement later in the play. Rama also talks about the danger from kin, for which there is no remedy; the enemy strikes the body, but the kinsman strikes the heart.[145]

Bhasa makes his audience aware of the burden of power. In the *Pratima,* Rama is not the least bit perturbed at the loss of his claims to the throne or the prospect of exile. He is actually relieved.

> "My mind heaved a sigh of relief as if a weight had been removed. Luckily I am still the same Rama and the king remains as king"[146]

As he leaves for the forest, Rama expresses sadness that Bharata has to carry the heavy burden of kingship all alone. Later, Bharata asks Rama to take back from him the burden of the kingdom. On being consecrated, Rama addresses his father in heaven and says that he is now the ruler of the earth, bearing the noble burden, to protect the world through dharma.[147]

One of the unusual features of Bhasa's plays is the fact that he shows a king in dire straits, as a target of violence. In the *Pratijnayaugandharayana,* king Udyana is captured through a stratagem, imprisoned, beaten, tortured, tied up, and wounded. Of course, the king shows great valor when captured and fights all day till he falls unconscious.[148] But the portrayal of a great king in such an abject and humiliating situation would be unthinkable in the epic or later *kāvya* tradition. It represents one of many elements of originality in Bhasa's dramatic art.

Creative engagement with the epic tradition is central to Bhasa's literary and political discourse. It is not clear which specific tellings of the epics Bhasa was responding to, but he no doubt used poetic license to mold characters and events in ways that best expressed both his poetic tastes and his political ideas. A striking aspect of Bhasa's political plays is the manner in which he deals with the two arch epic villains: prince Duryodhana of the *Mahabharata* and queen Kaikeyi of the *Ramayana.* Duryodhana is frequently referred to as Suyodhana, the negative prefix of his name being replaced by a positive one. (This is seen in the *Mahabharata* as well, but it is submerged in the larger negative portrayal of the Kaurava prince.) The *Pancharatra* portrays Duryodhana as a complex character—he is full of deceit but also follows dharma. What is more, in the end, he adheres to his promise

and agrees to give half the kingdom to the Pandavas. The nobility and pathos in Duryodhana's character are most pronounced in the *Urubhanga,* where he is portrayed as strong and brave, wedded to the warrior's code, a dutiful son, and loving father. As he lies on the verge of death, his thigh smashed by Bhima, we see a mellow Duryodhana, whose hatred toward the Pandavas has melted and who reflects with remorse on the terrible misdeeds he has committed in his lifetime. Bhasa makes him into a tragic hero.

Kaikeyi's makeover is equally striking. In the *Pratima,* although she is the object of much revilement from various characters, including her son Bharata, she is completely exonerated of all guilt toward the end of the play.[149] Rama points out that Bharata's succession to the throne was part of the dowry (*śulka*) that she was promised at the time of her marriage. Later, Kaikeyi reveals the story of the curse pronounced on Dasharatha while he was hunting, and says that she had taken on the burden of Rama's banishment not out of greed but so that the hermit's curse could come true and in order to protect the promise that Dasharatha had made at the time of their marriage. She says that she had always cherished a desire for Rama to become king. As for the issue of Rama's fourteen-year exile, she explains that she had meant to ask for fourteen days and had uttered fourteen years by mistake. Her version is accepted, and Kaikeyi participates happily in Rama's consecration.

We will see other aspects of Bhasa's creative engagement with the epics in later chapters of this book, especially his replacement of violence and war with negotiation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Bhasa's sympathetic treatment of the chief villains of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* show that while the epic traditions were an important element in literary political discourse, poets and dramatists felt at liberty to alter their events and characters. Bhasa's audience, which must have been well aware of the general plot of the epic stories, must have reacted to his creative departures with considerable interest and excitement.

Kingship in the Buddhist Tradition

The Buddhacharita: *Kingship versus Buddhahood*

At the turn of the millennium, there were several important Buddhist interventions in the evolving political discourse. Kingship and Buddhahood were discussed even more than before in terms of association, analogy, and contrast in texts such as the *Buddhacharita, Ashokavadana,* and *Jataka.* Further, the sculpted image of the king made its first appearance at Buddhist stupa sites. While there are certain common elements in Buddhist political discourse, it is much more heterogeneous than usually imagined, especially in its attitude toward political violence.

Ashvaghosha was a learned Buddhist scholar and poet who lived in the first or second century CE, perhaps in eastern India. He may have been associated with the Bahushrutiya school of Buddhism.[150] His two extant works are the *Saundarananda* (Handsome Nanda) and *Buddhacharita* (Life of the Buddha). A few passages of his play, *Shariputraprakarana,* also survive. We will focus on the *Buddhacarita.* This poetic Sanskrit work, divided into several cantos, uses ten meters and describes itself as a *mahākāvya* (great *kāvya*). Although the single surviving manuscript of the *Buddhacharita* breaks off in the fourteenth canto, with the Buddha-to-be moving toward enlightenment under the bodhi tree, the Chinese and Tibetan translations (whose existence shows that the text's influence traveled far) indicate that it was originally a twenty-eight-canto work that went on to talk about the Buddha's death, the distribution of his body relics, the collection of his teachings, and the eventual birth of king Ashoka. Interestingly, Ashvaghosha alters the prince's name Siddhartha (literally, succesful in his aims) to Sarvarthasiddha (successful in all his aims).

One of the striking aspects of the *Buddhacharita* is the way in which it deftly and almost seamlessly weaves together ideas from various traditions, including the epics and Dharmashastra, and gives detailed, argued responses and rejoinders to certain influential ideas of its time, especially those connected with kingship, renunciation, and dharma. Patrick Olivelle suggests that if the epics and *Manusmriti* represent Brahmanical responses to Buddhism, then the *Buddhacharita* represents a Buddhist response to that response.[151]As *kāvya,* the *Buddhacharita* would have had greater impact on political elites than the canonical Buddhist texts, which would have circulated largely in monastic circles. The work must have also played an important role in

the permeation of Buddhist ideas and ideals into classical Indian political thought.

Ashvaghosha knew the Vedas, Dharmashastra, and the political the philosophical treatises. He also know the epics well.[152] He refers to Valmiki as the first poet, and there are similarities between Valmiki's description of Rama's departure from Ayodhya and Ashvaghosha's description of Sarvarthasiddha's departure from Kapilavastu. Shuddhodana, whose grief at his son's departure is compared with that of Dasharatha, says that the latter was lucky to have died soon after his son left for the forest.[153] But Rama and the Buddha tread very different paths, and the stories of their lives have very different lessons to offer. The *Buddhacharita* makes a powerful case for the rejection of some of the central ideas of the epic, indeed of the entire Brahmanical tradition, including its political perspectives.

Dharma is central to the *Buddhacharita,* and, as is the case elsewhere, the term is used in many different senses. The text distinguishes between what is conventionally considered dharma (in the Brahmanical tradition) and the dharma that is true, imperishable, and absolute. Conventional dharma has many aspects. It is related to the ideas of the *trivarga* (dharma, *artha, kāma*) and the *āśramas* (the four life stages). It is also related to the practice of what is referred to in the Brahmanical Purana texts as *pūrtta*—which consists of pious acts such as building parks, temples, and hermitages. The true dharma (*sad-dharma*) is the dharma of liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*mokṣa-dharma*). As in the epics, dharma is described as subtle (*sūkṣma*). The inhabitants of the hermitages have a special relationship with dharma: They pursue it and are its bearers (*dharmabhṛt*); the *āśramas* are like workshops of dharma. And yet this dharma is a lesser one. The great sages who live in the hermitages follow a dharma of an earlier age. Sarvarthasiddha's quest is for the dharma for the new age, the goal of *mokṣa.* The prince is not willing to accept what the sacred texts or the experts say. He will rely only on his own understanding and judgment.[154]

Ashvaghosha is aware of the vocabulary of the political treatises. He alludes to the seven elements of the state. The *purohita* and *saciva* are presented as experts in statecraft, advising prince Sarvarthasiddha accordingly. The poet is aware of the basic elements in the circle of kings (ally, enemy, neutral king).[155] But what is more important is the fact that apart from giving a beautiful poetic narrative of the Buddha's life, his quest, and his teaching, Ashvaghosha directly extended

Buddhist philosophy to the realm of political power and gave a detailed exposition and critique of kingship in the light of that philosophy. At the end of the day, *rāja-dharma* (the dharma of the king) is not compatible with true dharma. And the *Mahabharata* model of the sage-like king is rejected through direct, forceful, cogent argument.

Ashvaghosha presents Sarvarthasiddha's father, Shuddhodana, as an ideal king.[156] He is self-controlled (*ātmajit*), calm, generous, learned, truthful, loved by his people, and just. He follows the tradition of being a king as well as an ascetic. He attains fame and his sovereignty (personified by the goddesses Shri and Lakshmi) is stable. He performs sacrifices, gives gold and cows to Brahmanas, and bathes at many pilgrimage places. He excels in statecraft and has won many treasures; his land is peaceful and prosperous, its people virtuous. Under his rule, the rains come at the proper time, and women give birth painlessly. The kingdom is free from famine, disease, and danger. The king has a paternalistic and benevolent attitude toward his people; they follow his example and are virtuous. He is fair and measured in punishment—he does not impose the death penalty on criminals without reason; nor does he set them free. Instead, he inflicts light punishment. In tune with older tradition, Shuddhodana throws open the prison doors for the periodic release of prisoners.

This description of the ideal king would not be out of place in a Brahmanical text, but it is tempered with a distinct emphasis on compassion and nonviolence. Shuddhodana has the deformed, sick, and wretched *gently* removed from the highway so that his son does not see them. He is angry with the charioteer Chhandaka for revealing life's harsh truths to the prince but does not punish him. He offers sacrifices without injuring living beings, as do his subjects. He is never aggressive, not even toward his enemies. Ashvaghosha tells us that

> he crushed the swollen pride of his enemies with the battle-axe of virtue, not war.[157]

But Shuddhodana has a major flaw. Although he loves dharma, he loves his son more. Due to the fear of losing him, he guards his son *against* dharma by submerging him in an excess of sensual pleasures.

Sarvarthasiddha, the Buddha-to-be, is, at least on the face of it, an ideal *potential* king. He belongs to the illustrious Ikshvaku lineage,

which had produced many sage-kings. He has a lion's mien and royal majesty. He is pure, wise, and noble from his childhood. But his potential actually surpasses that of an ideal king. He performs miracles. On being born, he immediately takes seven steps and declares that he has been born for enlightenment and the welfare of the world, and that this is his last coming-into-existence. The signs on his body have not been seen in noble kings of older times. His extraordinary self-control and self-possession (*ātmavattā*) are evident in the fact that he remains unmoved by the attempts of a host of beautiful and skilled courtesans to seduce him. Another aspect of his personality that sets him apart from all others is his great compassion (*anukampana, karuṇā*), which manifests itself as soon as he breaks out of the cocoon of pleasure and comfort that his father had woven around him. As he sits under the bodhi tree, he is possessed of resolve (*niścaya*), valor (*parākrama*), and energy (*tejas*). These qualities would not be out of place in a warrior king, except that Sarvarthasiddha uses them to achieve a very different goal—that of enlightenment.

A central issue that is discussed repeatedly and in great detail in the *Buddhacharita* is the relationship between kingship and renunciation. Yudhishthira of the *Mahabharata* periodically yearns to renounce the world, but allows himself to be dissuaded by others. In stark contrast, Sarvarthasiddha is firm in turning his back on kingship even before he is to become king. Although it is suggested in the beginning of the story that the ways of the world victor and world renouncer represent two alternative paths for the great man, the prince unequivocally rejects the former:

> "I do not desire unhindered kingship
> even in the triple heaven;
> how much more among humans!"[158]

The stand ultimately taken by the Buddha-to-be is presented as the culmination of a detailed debate on the appropriate time for a king to go to the forest. The *Buddhacharita* first gives a detailed exposition of the view (this is, in fact, the Brahmanical view) that renunciation is acceptable, even praiseworthy for a king, but that he should retire to the forest only after he has lived the life of a householder, paid his debts to the gods, sages, and ancestors, and discharged his duties as king. Shuddhodana's *purohita* and minister cite precedent and the

śāstras to buttress their arguments. They argue that kings have won *mokṣa-dharma* even while remaining kings. In a dialogue between Sarvarthasiddha and Shrenya (Bimbisara), king of Magadha, the latter urges him not to give up kingship. Practicing dharma is for the old, not for the young; the prince should perform sacrifices and enjoy the pleasures of life. Perhaps he wishes to renounce the world because he is impatient to become king. If that is so, Bimbisara generously offers, he is welcome to take half of *his* kingdom. But the prince gives spirited rejoinders to all these arguments. There is no "proper" time for renunciation.

While the relationship between kingship and renunciation, and the rejection of the old dharma in the quest for a new one, can be seen as emerging naturally from the outline of the Buddha's sacred biography, there are places where we get glimmers of Ashvaghosha's political perspective. The story of the Buddha's life naturally loaned itself to a focus on the royal vice of sexual indulgence. But the centrality of the theme in Ashvaghosha's poem suggests that he considered this as the most dangerous of the royal vices. The prince sees the ugliness that lies underneath the superficial desirability of the women of his harem, and this is an important step in intensifying his spiritual dissatisfaction. Less obviously connected with the main outline of the story—and therefore very significant from the point of view of political ideas—are the four verses on the evils of kingship that Ashvaghosha puts into the prince's mouth in a dialogue with Shuddhodana's *purohita*.[159] We have already encountered the idea of kingship as a burden in the epics and Bhasa's plays. Ashvaghosha goes much further and condemns kingship as a dangerous delusion. Sarvarthasiddha asks:

> "How can it be right for a wise man to accept
> kingship that is delusion's dwelling place,
> Where anxiety, pride and fatigue lurk, and damage
> to dharma by mistreating other men?"[160]

Kingship is also dangerous:

> "For a kingdom is charming yet full of dangers,
> like a golden castle that is on fire,
> like exquisite food that's mixed with poison,

like a lotus pond filled with crocodiles."[161]

Sarvarthasiddha also gives a novel explanation of why kings of earlier times had left their kingdom in their old age and headed for the forest: It was because of their experience of pain and hatred for a job that brought along with it neither happiness nor dharma.[162] It is better, he asserts, to eat grass in the forest than to live with the invisible dangers or evils (*doṣas*) that lurk concealed in royal power like black snakes. Ashvaghosha asserts (again, through Sarvarthasiddha's voice) that it is not possible for householder kings to attain *mokṣa.* The dharma of *mokṣa,* where calm (*śama*) predominates, and the dharma of kings, where force (*daṇḍa*) predominates, are poles apart. If a king takes delight in calm, his kingdom falls apart, and if his mind is fixed on his kingdom, his calm is destroyed—like water and fire, like cold and heat, calmness and fierceness are incompatible. It is therefore praiseworthy for kings to abandon their kingdoms and enter the forest, desiring dharma. And once they leave, they should never return.

Sarvarthasiddha goes even further than this in his conversation with king Bimbisara, making the radical pronouncement that because opposites such as happiness and sorrow always coexist, kingship (*rājya*) and enslavement (*dāsya*) are the same thing.[163] The authority of the king is a source of great sorrow; like a carrying pole, he has to endure great hardship for the sake of his people. The king cannot place his trust in his kingdom, which is full of enemies; nor can he *not* place his trust in it, for what happiness does he enjoy if he is trembling with fear? And at the end of the day, even if he conquers the whole earth, he still has only one house in one city in which to live. Utterly destroying the idea of the king as an exalted being, Sarvarthasiddha observes in a matter-of-fact way that the king is a mere man, who lives like other men. He wears one pair of garments, eats in order to satisfy his hunger, sleeps in one bed, sits on one seat. The opulent frills of kingship only make him arrogant. If kings of old have anything of value to offer humanity, it is the example of the gentle king Shibi, who was willing to give up his life for the sake of a dove. The violence of kingship is replaced by compassion.

While the *Buddhacharita* is one of the earliest surviving works of Sanskrit poetry, it actually subverts many poetic conventions of the larger tradition. The aims of *kāvya* were to entertain, enthrall, and

give fame to the poet and his composition. But Ashvaghosha specifically states that he had written this work not to display his poetic skills or learning, but for the sake of the welfare and happiness of all people.[164] In Sanskrit poetry, descriptions of beautiful women and love are associated with the sensitive mood known as the *sṛṅgāra rasa* and are meant to arouse tender emotions (*bhāva*) in the audience.[165] But in the fifth canto of the *Buddhacharita,* when the gods put all the beautiful women of the harem to sleep, the prince sees their true ugliness. The prince and the reader of the *mahākāvya* are filled with revulsion.

Ashvaghosha critiques not only sexual passion, but all kinds of love. Sarvarthsiddha inspires much love and affection—from his father, king Bimbisara, the people of Kapilavastu, the inhabitants of the hermitages, even from his horse. But all these varieties of love are described as sources of suffering. The meeting of people in life is as fleeting as a dream. The pain of separation cannot be ended by reunion with a loved one; rather, it must be ended by abandoning love. The only kind of love that has positive value and really counts in this story is Sarvarthasiddha's love for dharma (here to be understood as the truth), but ultimately, when he attains enlightenment, that love, too, is abandoned.

According to *kāvya* convention, the end of a poem or play is a time for happy reunions. Such an ending was not possible in a telling of the Buddha's life story, where conventional understandings of the human condition are rejected and reversed. As Sarvarthasiddha points out, separation is inevitable, and it is ignorance, not separation, that is the cause of grief. But it is a happy ending of a different kind: The protagonist attains enlightenment and the new-age dharma is poised to spread far and wide. Apart from the fact that his work represents an early stage in the *kāvya* tradition, the main reason for the differences between the *Buddhacharita* and later Sanskrit poetry is the fact that Ashvaghosha uses *kāvya* as a powerful vehicle of philosophical debate and propagation of Buddhist philosophy. The nature of that philosophy made it imperative for him to subvert some of the conventions, techniques, and aims of *kāvya,* as well as some of the central political ideas of the Brahmanical tradition. Kingship was rejected in favor of renunciation and enlightenment.

While the Buddha's life story asserts the superiority of the world renouncer over the world victor, Ashoka's life had the potential for offering a more positive role model for kings, especially one that emphasized nonviolence. But in the entire Buddhist world, Ashoka's own voice, which resounds clearly through his edicts, was obliterated by the legends that came to surround him. We have already seen that Ashoka's edicts give us a valuable first-person account of his ideas of dhamma, kingship, and empire. But the Ashoka of the edicts bears little resemblance with the Ashoka of Buddhist legend. Those who had fashioned the legends either did not know the edicts or deliberately chose to ignore them.

The legends have come down to us in the form of two broad traditions. The Sanskrit *Ashokavadana* represents the northern tradition, which circulated in northwestern India, Tibet, Central Asia, and East Asia. The fifth-century Pali *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa* and *Buddhaghosha*'s commentrary on the *Vinaya Pitaka* circulated in Sri Lanka and various parts of Southeast Asia. Here, we will focus on the *Ashokavadana,* a text that was probably composed in or around the Mathura area in the second century, but incorporates legends that must have been in circulation from an earlier time.[166]*Avadāna* means a meritorious deed, and the *Ashokavadana* is part of a larger anthology of Buddhist legends known as the *Divyavadana.*

The *Ashokavadana* weaves together Buddhist doctrines, including the ideas of karma, merit, and devotion to the Buddha. The text commences with the story of the monk Upagupta, and goes on to recount the story of Ashoka's gift of dirt to the Buddha in a previous birth; his life and acts before and after he was drawn to the Buddha's dhamma; his pilgrimage (along with the monk Upagupta) to the sacred places of Buddhism; and his death. It ends with the story of Pushyamitra Shunga, described as a descendent of Ashoka, who violently persecutes Buddhism and is ultimately killed by a *yakṣa* (a semi-divine being). The *Ashokavadana* incorporates Ashoka into the Buddhist model of kingship and portrays him as a powerful monarch, intimately associated with Buddhism, and an exceptionally generous patron of the Buddhist monastic order, the sangha. Nonviolence has no place in this portrayal.

The text heralds a new relationship between kingship and the

religious domain. Ashoka is directly connected with the Buddha through the legend of the gift of earth: In a previous life, when just a child, Ashoka had thrown a fistful of dirt into the Buddha's begging bowl and had simultaneously made a vow (*praṇidhāna*) that he should become a sovereign king through this root of merit. The Buddha had accepted the gift with a smile and prophesied the child's future greatness. Ashoka's status as emperor is described as a direct result of that prophecy, which is repeated several times in the *Ashokavadana.* Later, Ashoka meets the monk Pindola Bharadvaja, who was present when he had made the gift of earth. On meeting one who had seen the Buddha, Ashoka felt tremendous joy.[167]

Ashoka does not possess all the standard Buddhist virtues in the *Ashokavadana.* The negative portrayal of Ashoka before he came under the influence of the Buddha's dhamma does not surprise us. He is ugly, cruel, violent, and sadistic; his father does not love him and does not want him as his heir. Just before his father's death, Ashoka connives with the ministers to wrest the throne. He has his brother Susima killed as the latter enters the capital city. He personally beheads five hundred ministers when they ask him why he has ordered them to chop down all flowering and fruit trees and preserve the ones with thorns. He burns five hundred women of his harem alive when they cut the flowers and branches off an ashoka tree. Finally, his prime minister feels constrained to intervene in this orgy of violence:

> "Your majesty, it is not seemly for you yourself to do what is improper; why don't you appoint some royal executioners, men who will carry out the necessary killings for the king?"[168]

An executioner named Chandagirika is appointed. At his behest, Ashoka has a prison constructed, where he derives pleasure from witnessing the torture of hapless victims. According to the *Ashokavadana,* a remarkable change in Ashoka's personality took place due to his encounter with a monk named Samudra who had innocently strayed into this prison and who, after attaining enlightenment, withstood all the tortures to which he was subjected. Enormously impressed, the king announced that he would take refuge in the Budddha and the dhamma.[169]

Surprisingly, Buddhist hagiography blunts, but does not erase, Ashoka's violent predispositions and acts after his "conversion." The

executioner Chandagirika is burned alive and the torture prison destroyed. But the king still hunts and the episodes of bad temper, intolerance, and violence continue. He has 18,000 Ajivikas killed, and offers a dinara coin for the head of every Nirgrantha (Jaina) brought before him. He stops imposing capital punishment only after his brother Vitashoka is given the death sentence in a tragic case of mistaken identity. Well after this incident, he has his queen Tishyarakshita and the people of Taxila thrown into the fire when he hears of their role in the blinding of his beloved son Kunala, ignoring the latter's plea to show mercy.[170] This volatile and angry Ashoka is very different from the mature, measured, self-controlled king of the edicts. It has been suggested that the stories of Ashoka's cruelty were retained because the Buddhist tradition was apprehensive of the institution of kingship.[171] But the real reason seems to be that the tradition recognized that a certain amount of violence was an essential ingredient of kingship.

Unlike the earlier Buddhist texts which talk about a generic *cakravartin* (paramount king), later ones distinguish between different types of *cakravartin*s. Ashoka is described as a *cakravartin* who rules over one of the four continents (*caturbhāga-cakravartin*) and as a *cakravartin* who wields force (*bala-cakravartin*). In the Chinese translation of the *Ashokavadana,* he is called an iron-wheeled monarch who ruled over Jambudvipa (the subcontinent). The significance of these epithets and the larger classificatory system within which they are embedded emerge more clearly in Vasubandhu's fourth–fifth-century text, the *Abhidharmakosha.*[172] Here we see a correlation between the material out of which the conqueror's wheel was made, the number of continents over which he ruled, and the method whereby he achieved his great victories. The golden-wheeled *cakravartin* (*suvarṇa-cakravartin*) establishes his rule over four continents by simply going forth. The silver-wheeled one (*rūpya-cakravartin*) establishes his rule over three continents as a result of encounters with some petty kings. The copper-wheeled one (*tāmra-cakravartin*) establishes his rule over two continents after some resistance. The iron-wheeled one (*ayaś-cakravartin*) establishes his rule over one continent, namely Jambudvipa, through the use of weapons, although no one is actually killed in the process. Clearly, the Ashoka of the *Ashokavadana,* who uses force and rules over only one continent, is at the bottom of this listing. Nevertheless, he is a righteous king—a *dharmika-dharmarāja.* The Buddhist tradition

accepts that the king's force is compatible with his righteousness.

The greatness of Ashoka in the *Ashokavadana* lies primarily in his being a powerful and generous patron of the sangha and a builder of 84,000 relic stupas (known as *dharmarājikās*). The latter act involved aggression and violence. Ashoka marched, along with his army, to each of the original nine relic stupas, divested them of their relics, and placed a portion of them in a new stupa. After this, he built 84,000 relic stupas and came to be known as Dharmashoka. By building these stupas, Ashoka planted indelible marks of the Buddha's physical presence all over his realm, in the process sanctifying it and proclaiming his intimate links with the Buddha. He is also said to have symbolically witnessed and internalized the story of the Buddha's life by visiting the sacred places associated with him in the company of the monk Upagupta, making offerings wherever he went. But he took his army along on this pilgrimage.[173] The king and his army seem inseparable!

The *Ashokavadana* also presents Ashoka as a skillful disseminator of the Buddha's teachings. He was a "master of good means" (*upāyas*) who had understood the Buddha's teaching and sometimes used unusual means to propagate it. Ashoka's brother Vitashoka was critical of the Buddhist monks and thought that they enjoyed the pleasures of life. In order to make him realize his error, Ashoka allowed Vitashoka to become king for seven days, and stationed executioners at his gate. By the end of this experience, Vitashoka had learned that since monks comprehend and meditate on the certainty of suffering and death, they are immune to the pleasures of life.[174] Sometimes Ashoka's cruelty has a purpose, such as when he asked his ministers to bring him the heads of various animals and a human being and then to go to the marketplace and try to sell them. No one bought the human head because they found it disgusting. Ashoka's aim was to make his minister Yashas realize that there was nothing wrong in the king bowing his head and showing extreme deference to Buddhist monks.[175]

The king is prone to bouts of extreme and ostentatious generosity. In the course of the Panchavarshika festival in Pataliputra, he invites thousands of monks, gives 100,000 gold pieces to the sangha, and bathes the bodhi tree with four thousand pitchers of milk. Ashoka's generosity has a competitive edge. He wants to set a record. Not only does he want to outdo the businessman Anathapindika, the reigning champion of lay generosity, he also wants to out-do king Bimbisara,

the grand old royal patron of Buddhism. Goaded on by his son Kunala's light-hearted prank, he gifts much more than he intended—including himself, the women of his harem, his officials, and Kunala, but not the treasury. This state of affairs does not last long because Ashoka redeems all these things from the sangha by giving it 400,000 gold pieces.[176]

Ashoka's last bout of extreme generosity occurs toward the end of his life, after he has bestowed 96 kotis of gold on the sangha. He continues to give whatever he can, till all he has left is half an *āmalaka* (myrobalan) fruit.[177] He gives this, too. The fruit is mashed, put in a soup, and distributed to the monks. But even this is not enough. Just before he breathes his last, Ashoka presents the whole earth, except for the royal treasury, to the sangha. His ministers buy back the earth from the order by paying four kotis of gold pieces. So Ashoka's successor, Sampadin, has an earth to rule over, and Ashoka's desire to emulate Anathapindika's gift of a total of 100,000 gold pieces to the sangha is eventually fulfilled. He had equaled, although not surpassed, Anathapindika in generosity.

Woven into the *Ashokavadana* are critiques of kingship. On his deathbed, as he makes his last gift, the gift of the entire earth, to the sangha, Ashoka announces:

> "With this gift, I do not seek the reward
> of rebirth in Indra's abode or Brahma's world;
> even less do I want the glory of kingship
> that is as unsteady as a choppy sea.
> But because I give it with faith,
> I would obtain as the fruit of this gift
> something that cannot be stolen,
> that is honoured by the *āryas*
> and safe from all agitation:
> sovereignty over the mind."[178]

However, during his lifetime, Ashoka does not display the slightest sign of wanting to give up his royal position or renounce the world.[179] On the two occasions when he makes lavish gifts to the sangha, he does not include the treasury. The gifts to the sangha are redeemed, the first time by Ashoka himself, the second time by his ministers. The subtext is that the earth belongs to the king, and he must rule over it.

In this highly influential elaboration of the legend of Ashoka, the two wheels of dhamma no longer run parallel to each other, nor do they converge. The gap between them is widened, and the roles are clearly defined. Although inferior to the Buddha, the great king has taken on new roles: He is an aggressive religious patron, builder of religious edifices, and proselytizer of the faith. He is neither a prophet nor a practitioner of nonviolence.

Another influential expression of Buddhist ideas of kingship is located in the Pali *Jataka,* a collection of over five hundred didactic stories of the previous births of the Buddha, which form one of the fifteen books of the canonical *Khuddaka Nikaya.*[180] The composition of the text can probably be placed between the third century BCE and the third century CE. The *Jataka* draws on older oral and literary traditions of folk tales and fables, but its stories (known as Jatakas) were very deliberately selected, reworked, and packaged for Buddhist didactic purposes to forcefully emphasize Buddhist virtues. The composition of the *Jataka* therefore represents a very deliberate and carefully designed religious propaganda project, developed by some intrepid monks who recognized the value of such narratives for propagating Buddhist values. Each story has a prologue that indicates the occasion on it was narrated by the Buddha. Each has an epilogue in which the Buddha reveals the links through incarnation between the characters of the story set in the past and individuals living in the present. The prologue and the epilogue emphasize the moral of the story, which bears a clear and strong Buddhist stamp. Many of the stories also have strong political content.

The Jataka stories have a large cast of characters.[181] Kings, princes, queens, Brahmanas, merchants, ascetics, and robbers figure prominently. Apart from humans, the characters include animals such as deer, elephants, monkeys, lions, and jackals, as well as many types of birds, fish and snakes. Talking animals are found in many ancient textual traditions and are part of a larger cultural understanding of the relationship between the human and animal worlds.[182] In their profusion of talking animals, the Jatakas are similar to Aesop's fables, but there are differences. In Aesop's fables, apart from animals and humans, trees, flowers, plants, rivers, the wind, sun, seasons, and human body parts have speaking parts. They are also shorter and less complex than the Jataka stories, and their morals are drawn from common sense rather than religious doctrine.

Kingship is central to the Jatakas. Many of the stories are set in the time of a king of Kashi named Brahmadatta. We encounter human kings as well as kings in the animal world, and their stories exemplify royal ideals from a Buddhist perspective. As is the case with the larger animal story tradition in India, the ideas of karma and rebirth are

important in the Jatakas. However, unlike in the Brahmanical tradition, where animal birth is associated with sins committed in a previous birth, in the Jatakas, certain kinds of animal births are seen as a prelude to Buddha-hood. The bodhisattva (future Buddha) is supposed to have had numerous human as well as animal births; in several Jataka stories, he is a king, and not necessarily a human one. The social discourse of the Jatakas sometimes affirms and sometimes questions social hierarchies, occasionally giving a voice to the social underdog.[183] Many of the Jataka stories emphasize unity among kin, intelligence, and resourcefulness in situations of conflict or trouble. The moral message is woven with the political message.

The institution of kingship is considered to be as natural in the animal world as it is in the human world. The animals of the Jatakas have a political community akin to that of humans, and leaders in the animal kingdom need the same qualities as human kings. The Uluka Jataka gives the following account of the origins of kingship in the animal world: At the time when humans selected their king, the quadrupeds assembled and chose the lion as their king, and the fish of the ocean chose a fish named Ananda as theirs. The birds in the Himalayas also wanted to choose a king and decided on the owl. However, when a vote was taken on the matter, a crow objected on the grounds of the owl's grumpy expression, which would look even worse when he was angry. So the birds chose a handsome golden goose instead (he was none other than a bodhisattva). A fallout of this incident was that owls and crows nursed a permanent hatred for each other.[184]

In the evolution of Buddhist political thought, the Jatakas display some continuities as well as some innovations. The Tesakuna Jataka talks about the five powers (*balas*) of kingship: strength of arms (*bāhā*), wealth (*bhoga*), ministers (*amacca*), high birth (*abhijacca*), and intellect (*paññā*); the last of these is said to be the most important.[185] B. G. Gokhale points out that this list has three elements in common with the *Arthashastra*'s idea of the seven elements of the state—ministers, army, and treasury. It may be more fitting to see the idea of the five *balas* as an elaboration of the idea of the three powers (*śaktis*) of the king. To the three powers of military might, energy, and counsel, the Buddhist tradition significantly adds wealth and high birth. These elements were not part of earlier Buddhist political discourse.

The Jatakas speak of good kings and bad kings. The good king

protects his people, is truthful and just, and preaches and practices compassion toward all creatures.[186] He takes measures against violent animal sacrifices. The Rajovada Jataka tells the story of a bodhisattva who, as king of Banaras, ruled so righteously and perfectly and administered justice so fairly that the courts were deserted. A protocol issue arose when he encountered the just and righteous king of Kosala on the high road. Both kings were traveling on a quest to find out whether they had any fault in their own character. Only one carriage could pass through and the inferior king would have to make way. But who was the superior king? The king of Kosala was rough to the rough, mild to the mild, good to the good, and bad to the bad. But the bodhisattva king of Banaras had conquered anger with mildness and evil with goodness, gave gifts to misers, and repaid lies with truth. Obviously, he was the superior one, so the king of Kosala made way for him.[187]

Sometimes a great king has to sternly threaten violence. In the Dummedha Jataka, when the bodhisattva becomes king of Banaras, he decides to fulfill his previously made vow to make his people refrain from destroying life and to make them virtuous. Using the threat of extreme violence in order to prevent violence, he announces that he will kill all those who transgress righteousness and will offer the gods their flesh, blood, entrails, and vitals. This proclamation was made all over Banaras. People were terrified; none dared disobey the king's command and all practiced righteousness.[188]

But the more usual image of the king in the Jatakas is of one who is kind, generous, tender, and compassionate. For instance, when king Brahmadatta sees a nest in a tree, he has it taken down, and finds three eggs in it. The eggs hatch, and from them emerge an owl, a mynah, and a parrot. The king adopts the baby birds as his children. This act of compassion turns out to be to his advantage. The birds give him good advice on how to rule his kingdom wisely and righteously, and he promotes them to high office.[189]

We also encounter the king who gives everything up and renounces the world. The bodhisattva king Makhadeva of Videha ruled for 84,000 years. One day, on discovering that he had one grey hair, he saw death in front of him, and decided to turn his back on worldly pleasures and renounce the world. He handed over the reins of power to his son and became an ascetic living in a mango grove. In his next birth as king Nimi of Mithila, he did likewise.[190]

The Mandhatu Jataka highlights the dangers of royal arrogance and

lust for power.[191] Mandhata was a great, powerful king endowed with the seven precious things and the four powers. When he clenched his left fist and touched it with his right hand, seven kinds of jewels poured down. Mandhata ruled the earth for thousands of years but was dissatisfied and wanted something more. On hearing that heaven was a better place, he rolled along the wheel of empire and traveled to the heaven of the four great kings, who invited him to rule over their domain. After a long time, Mandhata was once again seized with dissatisfaction and longed to rule over a better place. On being told that the heaven of the thirty-three gods was more beautiful than this one, he rolled along the wheel of empire and headed toward it. The god Sakka (Indra) welcomed him and gave him half his kingdom. After millions of years of power-sharing, during which thirty-six Sakkas came and went, Mandhata was again seized by a desire for greater power. He thought to himself that half of this heaven was not enough; he should kill Sakka and rule alone. These violent and greedy thoughts were his undoing. Mandhata's power and life started ebbing, and because a human body cannot die in heaven, he fell earthward and landed in a park. There he breathed his last. The story of Mandhata, the *cakravartin* with an insatiable lust for power, drives home the destructive potential of excessive political ambition and arrogance.

Compassion, protectiveness, selflessness, humility, intelligence, resourcefulness, and extreme self-sacrifice are the ideal virtues of the bodhisattva and king. In the Chhaddanta Jataka, the bodhisattva is born as a mighty six-tusked elephant.[192] A jealous queen who thinks Chhaddanta loves a rival queen more, becomes queen of the king of Kashi in her next life, and sends a hunter to kill the elephant king and bring his tusks to her. The hunter disguises himself as a mendicant and carries a poisoned arrow. On learning of his mission, instead of killing him, Chhaddanta helps him to saw off his own tusks. Bleeding profusely and in great pain, the dying elephant tells the hunter:

> "I don't give you these, friend hunter, because I do not value them, nor as one desiring the position of Sakka, Mara or Brahma, but the tusks of omniscience are a hundred thousand times dearer to me than these are, and may this meritorious act be to me the cause of attaining Omniscience."[193]

The idea of a king's supreme self-sacrifice is also the theme of the Shibi Jataka.[194] Shibi is a righteous king who builds many almshouses in his capital city and regularly distributes lavish gifts there. He is, however, dissatisfied with this kind of giving and wants to give something that is a part of himself. One day, he vows that on that day, if someone asks him for a part of himself—his heart, flesh, eyes, or his whole self as a slave—he will give it without hesitation. The god Sakka decides to test him, appears before him in the garb of a blind Brahmana, and asks him to give him one of his eyes. Shibi joyfully offers his left eye and asks a surgeon to effect the painful transfer, in spite of the alarmed protestations of his officials.

> "The eye of omniscience is dearer than this eye a hundred fold, indeed a thousand fold: there you have my reason for this action," and he gave it to the Brahmana, who raised it and placed it in his own eye socket. There it remained fixed by his power like a blue lotus in bloom. When the Great Being [the king] with his left eye saw that eye in the Brahmana's head, he cried—"Ah, how good is my gift of an eye!" and thrilled with the joy that had arisen within him, he gave him the other eye as well.[195]

The king—now blind—contemplates becoming an ascetic, but the god Sakka ultimately restores sight to him—not normal human sight, but divine sight. Shibi becomes an ardent advocate of generosity and self-sacrifice, telling his people that they will attain heaven by practicing these virtues. Like Mandhata, Shibi is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*—except in the epic version of the story, he offers his flesh to redeem a dove from a hawk. Interestingly, some of the sculptural versions of this Jataka at Buddhist sites seem to follow the epic story line.

Since the Jatakas circulated in written, oral, and artistic forms, their outreach and potential impact was far greater than that of canonical texts. The relationship between oral, textual, and visual renditions of the Jataka stories is a complex one; they were not simple "translations" of each other. Which of the hundreds of Jataka stories were chosen for visual representation is also significant. It is not always easy to identify these representations with certainty.[196] At Bharhut in central India, the Jataka scenes have labels; at other sites,

they do not. Pilgrims to religious monuments may not have been interested in tracing the detailed story line of the Jataka relief sculptures they encountered. The reliefs may have had iconic value, signifying the presence of the Buddha or the course of his many lives in a general way, enveloping the devotee in their warm embrace, rather than having a specific narrative or didactic value. Or perhaps they were seen as visual allegories for various Buddhist virtues.[197] But there is no doubt that representations of the Jataka stories in stone sculpture at Buddhist sites such as Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati, and Nagarjunakonda as well as in the later Ajanta murals, made them part of the lived experience of pious Buddhist believers and pilgrims all over the subcontinent. The fact that the stories also spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia made them highly influential repositories and communicators of normative ideas of kingship across Asia.

The most popular Jatakas were about kings and refer to the pragmatic, moral, and karmic aspects of political power. While Mandhata offers a warning to over-ambitious kings, Chhaddanta and Shibi offer positive prototypes for emulation. Individually and collectively, these narratives emphasize the following qualities for a king: compassion and forbearance in the face of grave provocation; resourcefulness in time of emergency; extraordinary generosity; supreme self-sacrifice for the sake of others; and a strong desire for renunciation. The Jatakas seem to offer a model of kingship shorn of its arrogance and violence. However, as we shall see in Chapter 4, they are ambivalent toward the most violent of kingly activities, warfare.

The Birth of the Royal *Praśasti:* Kharavela and Rudradaman

Between circa 200 BCE and 300 CE, there was an expansion in the communicative media of rulers.—apart from inscriptions, royal power and authority were expressed through images and legends on coins and in stone sculpture. The range, type, and volume of royal inscriptions increased dramatically and Sanskrit gradually replaced Prakrit as the language of power. Some of the most important political ideas of the preceding centuries crystalized in mature works of poetry and drama. The panegyric (*praśasti*) of royal inscriptions offered a condensed and yet precise outline of the important ingredients in the ideology of kingship and played an important role in legitimizing political power.

There was a close relationship between the form, subject matter, and audience of *kāvya* and epigraphic *praśasti.* The latter has been described as political poetry and public poetry.[198] Given the presumably limited extent of literacy at the time and issues of placement and access, the circle of "readers" or even "listeners" of the inscriptions may have been confined to social and political elites. Further, as we shall see, the royal epigraphic discourse extended beyond *kāyva* conventions and vocabulary and embraced ideas expressed in Dharmasastra, the political treatises, epics, and Puranas, as well as, on occasion, non-Brahmanical traditions. A comparison with the Ashokan edicts reveals that although the moral aspect of kingship remained important, it was now expressed in very different ways. The angularities and idiosyncrasies of individual kings are concealed by elaborate idealized portraits of kings who were presented as exceptional and exemplary rulers.

The *praśasti* legitimized not only royal power, but also political violence, dictating how it was to be perceived from the king's point of view. The royal genealogy in the *praśasti* gives a sanitized version of intra-dynastic conflicts, suggests smooth transfers of power, and elides the violent power struggles that must have frequently preceded or followed the death of kings. The king's violence against his own subjects is subsumed in allusions to his maintenance of social order. The descriptions of violent wars against other states conceal military defeats, and advertise and celebrate victories. Martial kingship is

balanced with a detailed description of a host of the king's pacific, benevolent achievements.

These epigraphic images of kingship had enormous circulatory potential across kingdoms. Given the amount of detail about military victories in such inscriptions, it is very likely that they were crafted in order not only to impress and overawe the subjects of the king, but also to announce his exploits and greatness to rival kings and subordinates. It was possible for a literate reader to transcribe the text of an inscription, and that transcription could travel far and wide. This activity of transcribing epigraphic texts and the circulation of epigraphic models must have taken place on a large scale in ancient times. This goes a long way toward explaining the striking similarity in the format and style of royal inscriptions across different parts of the subcontinent and the spread of Indic epigraphic practice to Southeast Asia.

We should note that the large number of royal inscriptions, with which we are most concerned here and which provide a framework for the construction of dynastic histories, are greatly outnumbered by records of pious donations made by ordinary men and women from diverse social backgrounds. Political elites forged links with the religious ideas and institutions of their time, but the political sphere never completely captured or encompassed the sphere of sectarian religion.

Two royal inscriptions—of Kharavela from the east and Rudradaman from the west—are eloquent expressions of the evolving ideology of kingship. The ideas in these inscriptions emerged as an outcome of the intertextual dialogues discussed above. Although the two inscriptions differ in language, purpose, organization, and detail, there are some meeting points. Water figures in both and both connect themselves with the early kings of Magadha, although in different ways.

Kharavela, who lived and ruled in Kalinga in eastern India in the late first century BCE / first century CE, has been overshadowed in historical writing and popular perception by his famous Buddhist predecessor, Ashoka. But his inscription, in the Prakrit language and Brahmi script, inscribed across the brow and roof of a cave known as Hathigumpha on the Udayagiri hill in Orissa, is a remarkable document, presenting a carefully constructed epigraphic biography, extremely rich in political ideas.[199] The inscription clearly indicates that Kharavela was associated with Jainism. It begins with a salutation

to the Jaina *arhats* and *siddhas*. There is no detailed genealogy. Instead, the king's lineage affiliation is stated—he belonged to the Chedi or Mahameghavahana family and was a descendant of Ila, that is, he belonged to the lunar lineage. This is the earliest epigraphic reference to the epic-Puranic theory of the two megalineages of ancient India, the solar and lunar lineages.

Describing the education of the prince, his training, and exemplary qualities, the Hathigumpha inscription tells us that he discharged the duties of heir-apparent for nine years and became king when he turned twenty-five. It goes on to systematically narrate the highlights of the years of his reign. Kharavela is described as a great king (*mahārāja*), benefactor to his subjects, Brahmanas, and members of the Jaina order, akin to a wish-fulfilling tree. Apart from the Jaina salutation in the beginning, the inscription mentions (in line 12) that the king had re-enshrined a Jina image that had been taken away by the Nanda king—an allusion to the wresting and retrieval of a famous war trophy, evidently one of great religious significance. We are told that in his thirteenth year, the king gave gifts of silk and white cloth to the monks (this indicates that they belonged to the Shvetambara sect) who were associated with a relic shrine on the Kumari hill. He also convened a huge Jaina conclave at this place, and had various Jaina texts compiled. He seems to have had some shelters made for the monks (a queen named Sindhula also seems to have been associated with this activity). Kharavela describes himself as a layman devoted to worship, as one who had realized the nature of the soul (*jīva*) and body (*deha*).

The inscription uses the familiar vocabulary of statecraft. Kharavela is said to have followed the three-fold policy of force (*daṇḍa*), treaty (*sandhi*), and conciliation (*samaya*). This Jaina king did not renounce war; in fact, he proclaims his extensive conquests (this point will be elaborated on in Chapter 4). He specifically mentions rituals of anointment and re-anointment and is said to have remitted all taxes on the occasion of the performance of the *rājasūya* sacrifice.

The king is presented as promoting the welfare of the people of the cities and countryside, and as a builder and repairer. The inscription tells us that as soon as he was anointed, Kharavela ordered the repair of the gates, walls, and buildings of his capital city, Kalinganagara, which had been damaged by a storm. In this city, he constructed a lake embankment, tanks, and cisterns; and he had all the gardens restored. The cost of these activities, which gratified his people, is

recorded as 35,000 of an unspecified currency. In his fourth year, he repaired certain structures built by former kings of Kalinga. In his fifth regnal year, he brought into the capital a canal from the Tanasuliya road, excavated in year 133 of king Nanda. Later, he spent vast sums of money in building a "Palace of Great Victory" (Mahāvijaya). He built excellent towers with carved interiors, established a settlement of one hundred masons, and gave them tax exemptions. He built a huge elephant enclosure. He also seems to have built some sort of lavish structure (which cost 7,500,000 of an unspecified currency) associated with the Jaina sangha on the Kumari hill. The specification of the cost of these enterprises seems to have aimed at overawing the audience.

The last two lines of the Hathigumpha inscription sum it all up. They proclaim Kharavela as king of many things, endowed with extraordinary qualities and authority.

> He is the king of peace [*khema-rāja*], king of prosperity [*vaḍha-rāja*], king of monks [*bhikhu-rāja*], king of dharma [*dhama-rāja*], who has been seeing, hearing and realizing auspicious things.… [He is] accomplished in extraordinary virtues, [a] respector of every sect [*pāsaṁḍa*], the repairer of all temples [*devāyatana*], one whose chariot and army are irresistible, one whose empire is protected by the chief of the empire [himself], descended from the family of the royal sage Vasu, the great conqueror [*mahā-vijayo*], the king, the illustrious Kharavela.[200]

We can see some similarities with Ashoka in Kharavela's expression of respect for all sects, but unlike Ashoka, this Jaina king did not renounce violence; he was very much a military man.

An inscription in the Manchapuri cave at Udayagiri records its excavation for the Jaina monks of Kalinga.[201] The donor is the unnamed chief queen (*aga-mahisi*) of Kharavela, who gives details of her own lineage. What is significant for our purposes is that the fourth line of the inscription (which is damaged and difficult to read) seems to describe Kharavela as the *cakavati* (that is, *cakravartin*) of Kalinga. If this reading is correct, it is the earliest epigraphic use of the epithet *cakravartin* by a historical king of ancient India.

Important epigraphic testimony to the evolving Indian ideology of kingship during the period circa 200 BCE–200 CE also comes from the Kathiawar region of Gujarat in western India and highlights the

relationship between kingship and water resources even more forcefully. A rock found at Girnar (also known as Junagadh) bears three sets of royal inscriptions: the fourteen rock edicts of Ashoka, an inscription of the Shaka Kshatrapa king Rudradaman, and an inscription of the Gupta king Skandagupta. The latter two narrate the story of a water reservoir across dynasties, over a period of about a thousand years. Here we will look at Rudradaman's inscription, which happens to be the oldest long inscription in fine literary Sanskrit prose.[202]

The well-etched Brahmi letters of this twenty-line inscription, consisting of five long sentences, stretch across an area of over eleven feet on the rock face and are damaged in part. The inscription begins with the eulogy not of a king but of a lake called Sudarshana (literally "beautiful to look at") and goes on to narrate its history. The construction of this artificial reservoir was begun by Vaishya Pushyagupta, described as provincial governor (*rāṣṭrīya*) during the time of the Maurya king Chandragupta. It was completed under the supervision of Yavana Tushaspha during the time of Ashoka. The inscription then describes a terrible storm, which took place in year 72 (this no doubt refers to the Shaka era of 78 CE, which corresponds to 150 CE), which tore a huge breach into the lake, leading to its drying up. Against the counsel of his advisers who considered it an impossible task, Rudradaman initiated a massive repair operation. The work was entrusted to and successfully completed by the Pahlava (Parthian) Suvishakha, who seems to have been some sort of governor. This man is described as an able and honest officer who was loved by the people, and who, through his able governance, increased the merit and fame of his master, Rudradaman.

Framed within the description of the construction, breach, and repair of the water reservoir is an important expression of the ideology of kingship. The genealogy is partially damaged. The eulogy of *mahakṣatrapa* Rudradaman tells us (lines 10–11) that

> from the womb he was distinguished by the possession of undisturbed Royal Fortune [*Rāja-Lakṣmī*], was resorted to by all *varṇas* and chosen as their lord to protect them; [was one] who made, and is true to, the vow to the latest breath of his life to abstain from slaying men, except in battles; who [showed] compassion [*kāruṇya*].

So although he upheld the principle of nonviolence, he did not abjure war. In fact his martial achievements are described in detail (these will be discussed in Chapter 4). But Rudradaman's great fame rested not only on his military victories but also on a long list of other stellar qualities and achievements. The king was handsome; learned in grammar, music, logic, and other disciplines; protected his people and had an over-flowing treasury; was compassionate; was generous and benevolent toward cows and Brahmanas; and was attached to dharma. He did not oppress his people with excessive taxes or forced labor. They, in turn, were devoted to him and were free from all troubles.

The eulogy presents a balanced portrait of an ideal king. What is more, the most important achievement that is highlighted is the repair of the Sudarshana water reservoir, which was aimed at alleviating the despair of his people and augmenting the king's dharma and fame (*kīrtti*). There is a marked Brahmanical element in the presentation of the king as benevolent toward Brahmanas and a protector of the *varṇa* order. Rudradaman's inscription announces the arrival of elegant Sanskrit as the vehicle for expressing political power. Although it mentions compassion and nonviolence, the emphasis is on the model of a warrior-king who possesses many pacific virtues.

Visual Representations of Royalty

In Ashoka's time, while the king's thoughts could be read and heard, his physical form was absent. The figural sculpture of that time, largely associated with the capitals of the emperor's pillars, was dominated by animals that had deep symbolic resonance. This changed toward the turn of the millennium, when we see the earliest representations of royalty carved on stone.

It is intriguing that while there are plenty of representations of deities and saints in ancient India, kings, whether dead or alive, were depicted rarely, except on coins. Are we dealing with a powerful cultural idea that ordinary mortals, even if they happened to be kings, should not ordinarily be represented visually in sculpture or painting—that only gods, demigods, Buddhas, and *tīrthaṅkara*s qualified for this? (Even in Buddhism and Jainism, there is an early aniconic phase in which symbols predominate.) Was it considered inappropriate to have images of kings in religious places? Was the infrequency of visual representations of individual kings due to the privileging of the lineage rather than its individual members? Was this connected with a sociopolitical outlook that preferred to focus on collectivities rather than the individual? Where royal portraits do occur, there is stylization and ambiguity, and a blurring of the distinction between king and deity. Vidya Dehejia suggests that the indifference toward verisimilitude can perhaps be traced to the understanding of the self in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions, where the body is considered ephemeral and where suppression of the ego is valorized.[203] Whatever may be the reasons, it is intriguing that although kings are very prominent in ancient poetry and drama, they are shadowy figures in sculptural art. Against this background, it is interesting to note that they *do* make an appearance in stone relief sculpture during the period circa 200 BCE–300 CE.

We have already seen the references to the *cakkavatti / cakravartin* in Buddhist texts, where he is associated with the seven treasures—namely, the wheel, elephant, horse, jewel, woman / queen, land-owning householder, and prince / adviser / general. Representations of the *cakravartin* with his "treasures" occur in relief sculptures at several early Buddhist sites such as Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.[204] The scene often occurs in abridged form, showing

some and not all seven “jewels.” What is especially interesting is the fact that the *cakravartin* is usually shown raising his fisted right hand, his left hand about to strike or having just struck that fist in order to release a shower of money and jewels (see Figure 2). In these representations, the “jewels” are an important frame, but what dominates the scene is the king’s powerful stance and his upraised clenched fist, which holds within it the promise of fabulous riches, expressing his great munificence.

As mentioned earlier, kings also figure in artistic representations of Jataka stories where they are the main protagonists, such as the Mandhatu Jataka. In fact, it has been suggested that the representations of the generic *cakravartin* (discussed above) are actually representations of Mandhata. In some places, this king is shown in other poses, such as sitting in heaven with Indra.[205] Monika Zin asks why this “morally dubious” king was chosen for such frequent representation, not only in the Andhra school of sculpture but also at many other distant places such as Bagh, Kizil, Tibet, and Borobudur. She suggests is that this was because Mandhata personified auspicious kingship. The more likely reason is that the Buddhist version of the story of Mandhata embodies and communicates a very important political lesson—namely, the great danger posed by the king’s arrogance to himself.

Certain historical kings of Magadha and Kosala appear in early Buddhist art as part of the story of the Buddha’s life. For instance, a Bharhut relief panel in the Indian Museum in Kolkata shows Ajatashatru riding an elephant in a royal procession and ultimately performing obeisance before an ornamented throne, parasol, and footprints, which symbolize the Buddha. The Prakrit inscription on the side reads: “Ajatasatu Bhagavato vandate” (Ajatashatru worships the Lord [Buddha]).

2 Sculpture of a *cakravartin* from Amaravati (in the Musée Guimet)

Photograph: Upinder Singh

Ashoka figures in three scenes at Sanchi. A scene carved on the southern gateway of Stupa 1 seems to depict his visit to the Ramagrama Stupa.[206] We see the king with the royal insignia of turban, ewer, and fly-whisk riding in procession in a horse-drawn chariot, accompanied by an entourage that includes infantry, cavalry, elephants, and chariots. The procession is moving toward a stupa, on the other side of which four serpent deities (*nāgas*) and their families bear offerings in their hands. Another scene, carved on the western

pillar of the southern gateway of Stupa 1, may represent Ashoka's visit to the bodhi tree.[207] A Stupa 2 railing relief shows a king—probably Ashoka—supported by or with his arms on the shoulders of two queens, flanked by three attendants.[208]

But the most dramatic evidence of royal representations come from Kanaganahalli in the Gulbarga district of Karnataka, where several kings figure in the midst of an explosion of beautiful relief carvings on limestone slabs that once ornamented a magnificent brick stupa, which now lies in ruins.[209] The carvings belong to the second and third centuries CE and the kings are identified by label inscriptions. The representations are highly stylized, without any significant differences in physique or facial features. But there are significant variations in the overall composition and in the details of ornaments, headdresses, and clothing. Ashoka figures in two scenes. In one, he appears along with his queen, with three women attendants, two bearing fly-whisks and one an umbrella (Figure 3).[210] He wears an elaborate headdress, armlets, and earrings, and interestingly, the sacred thread, worn across the torso by the upper *varṇas*. The queen, wearing a necklace, girdle, and heavy anklets, plays with her earring with her right hand. The king's and queen's bodies tilt toward each other at the waist; they could be in conversation. The inscription reads "Rāyā Asoko." (king Ashoka). In the second scene, which carries a similar inscription, the king stands with folded hands to the left of the bodhi tree, which is preceded by a pair of footprints; a man (perhaps a prince?) stands to the right.[211] In the upper part of the scene are two women, one holding flowers and the other a bowl with some offerings. It has been suggested that this scene represents Ashoka venerating the bodhi tree along with his son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitra.[212] Taken together, these two scenes reflect the iconic status that Ashoka had achieved not long after his death in the Indian Buddhist world.

3 Ashoka and his consort, Kanaganahalli

Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India

Apart from Ashoka, five Satavahana kings appear on relief carvings at Kanaganahalli. They can be identified by means of inscriptions as Simuka, Satakarni I, Mantalaka, Sundara Satakarni, and Vasishthiputra Pulumavi. The kings have elaborate headdresses and wear ornaments around their necks and arms, and they are usually shown in a palace setting.[213] Mantalaka is shown sitting on a couch

along with his queen, holding a cup in his right hand. Their bodies cling close; her firm breasts press against his cup and her right arm is flung around his neck. Both look tipsy. Taken together, the scenes depicting kings at Kanaganahalli portray the ceremonial aspects of kingship. They exalt the position of king through the deployment of attendants and royal insignia and announce him as a devout devotee and donor. But they also represent his relationship with his consort in terms of intimacy and affection. Why were scenes of the Buddha's life interspersed with these lively representations of Ashoka and Satavahana royalty at Kanaganahalli? Ashokan inscriptions have been found nearby at Sannati but there is no evidence that the Satavahana kings were donors there or nearby.[214] Clearly, it was important for the monastic community to claim a connection with these kings, whose rule extended over the area, whether or not they had extended financial patronage toward the establishment.

Another representation of Satavahana royalty comes from far-away Naneghat (in Pune district, Maharashtra) in western India and is located on a major route of communication connecting the western ghats with the ports on the Arabian Sea coast. In a niche in the back wall of a cave are traces of relief sculptures of eight life-size figures, representing three generations of a royal lineage, including dead and living members. The only features of the sculptures that can now be made out are the feet, and in some cases, only barely so. The names of the figures are carved in large Brahmi letters over their heads, without which it would have been impossible to identify them.[215] These inscriptions give us the following list: the illustrious king (*rāyā si*) Simuka Satavahana; queen (*sirimāto devi*) Nayanika / Naganika and the illustrious king (*raño*) Satakarni; prince (*kumāro*) Bhayala; (the name of the fifth person is lost); *maharathi* Tranakayira; prince (*kumāro*) Haku-shri; and prince (*kumāro*) Satavahana. This stiff family portrait seems very different from the lively scenes of the Satavahana kings carved at Kanaganahalli.

Far away, at Udayagiri in eastern India, are a series of relief sculptures in two caves close to the Hathigumpha which has the inscription of Kharavela, discussed earlier.[216] Although fragmentary and greatly damaged, the relief carvings in the Ranigumpha and Manchapuri caves may well tell in images the story that the Hathigumpha inscription narrates in words. In the Ranigumpha, we see a male figure with a parasol over his head and people standing or kneeling in front of him with folded hands. A consort, a caparisoned

horse, a woman with a tray, women bearing water-pots on their heads or in their hands, and a man with a sword on his shoulder are part of the composition. The scene suggests a king about to set forth on an expedition, perhaps one of those mentioned in the Hathigumpha inscription. The scene in the Manchapuri cave depicts two male figures (one wearing a crown) and two female figures worshipping an object on a platform—perhaps it is the Kalinga Jina that Kharavela brought back from Magadha. We seem to have here rare instances of epigraphic and visual narrations of important events in the life of an ancient Indian king. It is significant that not a single one of the early sculptural representations of kings shows them directly engaged in warfare.

While kings appear occasionally in stone sculpture, they start appearing frequently on coins, which provide vivid evidence of changes in the ideology of kingship. They first make their appearance in the die-struck coinage of the Indo-Greeks. The coins of the Greco-Bactrians that circulated to the north of the Hindu Kush follow the Attic weight standard; they have royal portraits on the obverse, while the reverse generally depicts Greek deities such as Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, along with the king's name and title in Greek. The Indo-Greek coins that circulated to the south of the Hindu Kush followed an Indian weight standard and had bilingual inscriptions in Greek and Kharoshthi (and rarely, Brahmi). Silver coins of Philoxenus show the helmeted king seated on a prancing horse on the obverse,[217] but most Indo-Greek coins carry the king's bust. The gods and goddesses on the reverse (many from Indian pantheons) are shown in full bodily form, in a variety of poses.

The great diversity in the numismatic royal portraits points toward some attempt at realism, which is also seen in the coins of the Scytho-Parthians and Satavahanas (though not on the coinage of the Kshatrapas).[218] The presence of Gaja-Lakshmi (the goddess Lakshmi flanked by two elephants) on coins of the Scytho-Parthian king Azilises is notable, and seems to be the numismatic parallel to the strong association of this goddess with kingship in textual sources. Like sculptural art, coinage advertises the king not as a warrior but as one closely associated with the religious domain.

Kushana Kingship: Dynastic Cult?

The Kushana empire began as a Central Asian kingdom, and expanded into Afghanistan and northwestern India in the early centuries CE. The fact that Bactria was the center of the empire is evident in the use of the Bactrian language in king Kanishka's coins and inscriptions. The empire consisted of various tiers of control, some areas under the direct control of the kings and others under subordinate rulers who had the title *kṣatrapa* or *mahākṣatrapa*. Some subordinate rulers acknowledged Kushana paramountcy and paid tribute, while others were practically autonomous. Historians have argued that the Kushanas introduced into India a new notion of divine kingship. The evidence cited includes epithets such as *devaputra* (son of a god / the gods), *bagopouro* (son of god), and *bagoshao* (god king).[219]

As on Indo-Greek coins, the representations of Kushana kings on their coinage are quite individualistic, with varying facial features (see Figure 4).[220] The coins of Vima Kadphises show him standing for the first time, sacrificing at an altar. This is the most frequent pose in which kings of this dynasty were hereafter portrayed. The great variety of deities on the reverse signifies their attempt to advertise their relationship with gods and goddesses drawn from different religious traditions—Hellenistic, Persian, and Indian.

Excavations at Mat near Mathura revealed the ruins of a structural complex and traces of a circular temple of Kushana times, which has been interpreted by some scholars as a sanctuary where images of the Kushana kings were worshipped.[221] Two inscribed broken stone images, evidently of royalty, were found near the circular temple. The fact that these images were outside the sanctum does not suggest that they were the principal objects of worship. Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan has also yielded certain structural remains and royal images, along with an inscription in the Bactrian language and Greek script, reflecting the claims of Kushana kings to divine status.[222] Here too, the statues of the Kushana kings were not found in the cella. The third important site is Rabatak in Afghanistan, where a twenty-three-line inscription, written in the Bactrian language and Greek script, describes king Kanishka as "the great deliverer, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god, one who is worthy of worship, who has obtained kingship from Nana [a West Asian goddess] and all the

gods."[223] Kanishka is also referred to as a king of kings and a son of the gods. There are references to his ordering the construction of a temple wherein images of the goddess Nana and several other deities were to be installed. The inscription also mentions his commanding an officer to make images of his (Kanishka's) great-grandfather Kujula Kadphises, his grandfather Saddashkana, his father Vima Kadphises, and Kanishka himself.

4 Kushana gold coins: (a) Kanishka at altar (obverse), god Athsho (reverse); (b) Huvishka (obverse), god Shahrevar (reverse); (c) Huvishka (obverse), god Shiva (reverse)

Pankaj Tandon collection, photographs courtesy Pankaj Tandon

The evidence of a Kushana "dynastic cult" consisting of the worship of kings of the dynasty is not conclusive. But the building of

monumental temples to the gods and the placing of imposing sculptures of kings in these temples certainly reflect an innovation in Indian political practice. A connection with the gods is also suggested in coins that depict the king with a disc nimbus around his head and flames emanating from his shoulders, as well as kings shown sitting or emerging from clouds or mountains. The assertion that Kushana kingship was marked by a belief in the divinity of kings has to be considered against the background of the Iranian and West Asian traditions that they drew on and may have amounted to an exaltation of the institution of kingship, rather than the actual worship of individual kings.

The details of the two headless stone images found at Mat, currently housed in the Mathura Museum, demand close attention. One shows a Kushana king—probably Vima Kadphises—wearing heavy boots, seated on a lion-throne (*siṁhāsana*). Although the connection of kingship and the lion is pervasive in many Asian traditions, this lion throne appears to be stylistically West Asian.[224] The pendant legs of the king are also unusual in the Indian tradition of this period. The second image, which represents Kanishka (Figure 5), is even more dramatic and revealing. The head and arms are missing, but going by the depiction of this king on his coins, we can imagine that his face must have been bearded and he must have worn a conical Central Asian cap. The inscription across the lower edge of his robe announces him as "the great king, king of kings, son of the gods, Kanishka."[225] At first glance, the king's attire and weaponry seem entirely Central Asian. He wears a knee-length tunic fastened at the waist with a belt, over which he has a stiff ankle-length outer robe. His large, heavy, padded boots are strapped round the ankles. His left hand firmly clasps the hilt of a great sword, ornamented with the carving of a bird's neck and head. In his right hand, he holds a long mace, which has two very Indian elements: Its shape changes from round to sixteen-sided to eight-sided, reminiscent of Indian pillar forms; and a crocodile (*makara*) is carved near the bottom. (Various Kushana coins also show kings holding a mace.) In its depiction of the king with sword and mace (which can signify either or both force and justice), this Kushana statue perhaps gives us the earliest visual image that combines two central ingredients of ancient Indian kingship in its internal and external use of force—the king as warrior and dispenser of justice.

5 Kanishka image, Mathura Museum

Photograph: Upinder Singh

Kanishka is celebrated in Buddhist texts as a great patron of Buddhism. He is said to have enshrined the Buddha's relics in a stupa at Purushapura. A great Buddhist conclave was held during his reign. He is supposed to have patronized Buddhist scholars such as Ashvaghosha and Vasumitra and sent Buddhist missionaries to various parts of Central and East Asia. Yet (like those of his predecessor, Huvishka), Kanishka's coins depict motifs drawn from a great variety of Indian, Greek, and West Asian religious traditions. Apart from the Buddha, we see Shiva, representations of Persian gods such as Atash

and Mithra, and Greek deities such as Helios and Selene. This variety of religious motifs is usually taken as reflecting the king's personal religious eclecticism. It should properly be seen as an acknowledgment of the religious diversity within the empire and the attempts of the Kushana kings to connect themselves with the many deities worshipped in and around their realm. The syncretic elements in the culture of these times is vividly reflected not only in these coin motifs but also in the sculptures of the Gandhara school, as well as in certain extraordinary images that combine attributes of gods such as Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, and Indra.[226] All this marks a significant change in the religious underpinnings of the ideology of kingship during the early centuries of the Common Era.

Royal Religious Policy

Inscriptions also announce several innovations in the political interactions with the religious domain, which became part of the long-term Indian political tradition. The connection between kings and sectarian elements are proclaimed in the invocations and seals of their inscriptions. And yet, while sectarianism became an important aspect of the ideology of kingship, it did not succeed in circumscribing that ideology. Royal patronage was extended to a variety of beneficiaries in a way that rules out the identification of any particular religion as a "state religion." In fact, the inability of any religious tradition to exclusively capture the political sphere was to have far-reaching consequences in Indian history.

In the epigraphs of the Satavahanas, Kshatrapas, and Ikshvakus, the image of the king as victor in war remained important, but it was increasingly balanced by the image of the king as a performer of sacrifices and a generous donor who bestowed grants of land on worthy recipients. The Nasik inscription of Gautami Balashri, dated in the nineteenth year of her grandson, the reigning king Vasishthiputra Pulumavi, is an interesting document. It is in Prakrit but has long compounds of the kind usually found in Sanskrit. The inscription records the gift of a village by king Pulumavi to Buddhist monks of the Bhadavaniya sect for the embellishment of a cave excavated on the Trirashmi hill for them at the behest of his mother, Gautami Balashri. The grant is described as a *dhama-setu* (a bridge of dharma, here to be understood as merit) for the deceased king. It begins with praise of Gautami Balashri, describing her as mother of a great king; devoted to truth, charity, forgiveness, and nonviolence; incessantly engaged in penance, self-control, restraint, and fasting; and following the way of life of the wife of a royal sage (*rājarṣi*). The inscription goes on to bestow fulsome praise on her son Gautamiputra Satakarni (the former king) as a peerless Brahmana and great warrior, who had inherited royal power from a lineage of illustrious ancestors, who had destroyed the haughtiness and pride of the Kshatriyas, who had won many victories over his adversaries, and whose paramountcy was acknowledged by all the circles of kings (these details will be discussed in Chapter 4).[227] Gautamiputra's martial qualities are balanced by many other kinds of attributes. He is described as

beauteous in appearance, with strong, long arms and the gait of a magnificent elephant. He was devoted to his mother and pursued the three goals of human existence at the right time and place. He was the refuge of royal fortune (*Śrī*), a source of good conduct, and the abode of the sacred texts (*āgamas*). He prevented the mixture of *varṇas*, wisely spent the taxes he collected, and was averse to imposing capital punishment, even on his enemies. He held festivals and archery contests. Interestingly, he is said to have ensured the prosperity of the Brahmanas as well as the lower classes. There are several epic–Puranic analogies: Gautamiputra's prowess is compared with that of Rama, Keshava (Krishna), Arjuna, and Bhima; while his luster is compared with that of Nabhaga, Nahusha, Janamejaya, Sagara, Yayati, Rama, and Ambarisha. The epic-Puranic tradition had permeated the eulogy of the king.

Royal religious policy included the performance of Vedic sacrifices and land grants to Brahmanas, Buddhist monasteries, and temples. We have noted the association of the Shunga king Pushyamitra with the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. The Naneghat inscription of queen Naganika (first century BCE) mentions villages and other items offered as fee to officiating priests when certain Vedic sacrifices, including the *aśvamedha,* were performed by her husband Satakarni I. A second-century CE Nasik cave inscription of Ushavadata describes him as one who had gifted sixteen villages to the gods and Brahmanas. The inscription also records the grant of a field by Ushavadata to provide food for the Buddhist monks dwelling in the cave. An inscription of Gautamiputra Satakarni in one of the Nasik caves, belonging roughly to the same period, records the grant to Buddhist monks of a field located in a village that previously fell within the jurisdiction of Ushavadata. This is the first ancient Indian inscription that associates certain specific privileges and exemptions with a gift of land. It states that the land was not to be entered or disturbed by royal troops, was not to be dug for salt, was free from the control of state officials, and was to enjoy all sorts of immunities (*parihāras*). Satavahana queens also played an active role in making grants to Buddhist establishments.

The site of Nagarjunakonda gives unique, graphic evidence of the close relationship between the Ikshvaku dynasty and religious establishments. This site revealed remains of a royal city including a citadel, royal residences, Buddhist monasteries, Hindu temples, and twenty-two memorial pillars. Inscriptions record gifts made by

Ikshvaku political elites and others to Hindu temples and Buddhist monks. The many memorial stones honoring dead generals and soldiers speak eloquently of the pervasive violence and war that marked the age. While the royal inscriptions herald the kings' performance of great Vedic sacrifices (*aśvamedha, agniṣṭoma,* and *vājapeya*), these kings do not appear to have been active in making donations to religious establishments. The leading role was played by women of the royal household, high-ranking military commanders, and affluent nonroyal people.[228] An exception is Ehavala Chantamula, whose Patagandigudem copper plates (the oldest copper plate inscription found in the subcontinent) record the building of a four-hall compound and the grant of land in favor of a Buddhist monastery that seems to have been close to Amaravati.[229]

And yet, the plurality in royal religious patronage did not completely eliminate religious conflict. Buddhist texts provide the earliest reference to religious persecution and violence in the Indian context and connects these with Pushyamitra Shunga.[230] According to Buddhist legend, on the advice of a wicked Brahmana, Pushyamitra decided to rival Ashoka's fame by destroying the 84,000 stupas that the latter had built. Pushyamitra is said to have marched to the Kukkutarama monastery, accompanied by his fourfold army. It was a one-sided encounter because the monks were in no position to resist. Pushyamitra offered them a choice of keeping either the 84,000 stupas or the 84,000 monasteries; they chose the former. The king then destroyed the monasteries and killed all the monks. Later, he offered a reward of one hundred gold coins for anyone who brought the head of a Buddhist monk to him. Ultimately, we are told, Pushyamitra and his entire army were annihilated, and the Buddha's dhamma was saved through the intervention of two Buddhist-minded *yakṣas*.[231]

According to John Marshall, the Ashokan brick core of the great stupa at Sanchi revealed evidence of "great damage" that was "wantonly inflicted." He connected this with the anti-Buddhist reputation acquired by Pushyamitra Shunga.[232] Pushyamitra has also sometimes been held responsible for the destruction of the Ghoshitarama monastery at Kaushambi and the Deorkothar stupa in central India. On the other hand, Sanchi and other Buddhist monasteries in central India continued to exist and flourish during the Shunga period. Was this in spite of Pushyamitra's persecution of the Buddhists? Was it because later Shunga kings discontinued his anti-Buddhist policy? Or should the Buddhist stories of Pushyamitra's

persecution be considered exaggerated? It is difficult to say for sure, but there must be some historical basis for the fact that Buddhist tradition singles out certain kings for their anti-Buddhist stand, even if their complaints cannot be taken at face value. The stories about Pushyamitra Shunga form one of three accounts of violent religious persecution by kings in early India; the other two will be discussed in Chapter 3. All three have to do with the persecution of Buddhism.

The Justification of Political Violence

The ideas of state, empire, and political paramountcy, as well as a distinction between internal and external affairs and between punishment and war existed in ancient India.[233] In the discussion of the ideals and realities of kingship, the distinction between legitimate force and violence in the political sphere was recognized in its general form as well as in relation to the king's punishment and warfare. During the period circa 200 BCE to 300 CE, while there were some continuities from the earlier period in the discourse on kingship, there was an amplification of the political discourse and new emphases in ideas related to kingship and governance. The problem of political violence was seen from a variety of perspectives and elicited different sorts of response.

The *Arthashastra* offers a purely pragmatic political response. Its hypothetical king is an ambitious empire-maker, driven by the desire to maximize political and economic profit. Kautilya presents a detailed, sophisticated discussion of the use of force by the king in order to hold his own against enemies within his kingdom, to punish criminals and deliver justice, to maintain the social order, and to expand his empire through warfare (this last aspect will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). He also discusses the dangers of using excessive force and the constant threat of violence *against* the king. For Kautilya, the use of force is necessary to maintain and extend the king's political power, but it must tempered by reflection, caution, and calculation. The *Manusmriti* speaks of the king's great anger and power and presents him, above all, as the maintainer of *varṇa-dharma* and as a punisher, from the perspective of the discipline of Dharmashastra.

The importance of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the political sphere is evident in the *Buddhacharita* and the *Arthashastra,* and even more so in the dramas of Bhasa. Early *kāvya* expanded the exploration of issues related to political power and political violence within the aesthetic demands of the genre and began the task of weaving together various elements to create a sophisticated literary image of the king, at the same time aware of the harsh realities of political conflicts. The epigraphic *praśastis* expressed the literary image of kingship in a compressed, condensed form. The fact that Brahmanical ideas swiftly came to dominate royal ideology was no

doubt due to the presence of Brahmana intellectuals and ritual specialists in royal courts.

Different models of kingship emerged within the Buddhist tradition. In the *Buddhacharita,* kingship is a prize rejected by Sarvarthasiddha as inferior to renunciation and enlightenment. The *Ashokavadana* emphasizes the king as religious patron and proselytizer, not as a practitioner of nonviolence. The Jatakas emphasize compassion and self-sacrifice as qualities of the ideal king. Perhaps because most of the sculptural representations of kings come from Buddhist sites, they do not display kings in military contexts or attitudes (Ashoka's armed visit to Ramagrama is an exception) but, rather, show them as pious devotees and donors. The statue of Kanishka, a king with Buddhist leanings, on the other hand, gives striking visual expression of the dual ideas of the king using force within his kingdom in the administration of justice and against other kingdoms while waging war.

Texts, inscriptions, stone sculpture, and coins indicate that the balancing of the violence of kingship with other elements was well underway during circa 200 BCE–300 CE. The performance of Vedic sacrifices was an important part of the evolving ideology of kingship. The details of these sacrifices can be reconstructed on the basis of the older ritualistic texts, but they may not have been performed in exactly the same fashion. And from the perspective of the royal performers, the detailed symbolism and meaning of these sacrifices must have been minimal. They must have been understood as potent demonstrations of the king's political power, authority, and prestige, his command over resources, and his close relationship with the sacred. The performance and the advertisement of the performance of Vedic sacrifices in inscriptions constituted a powerful legitimation, not only of kingship in general, but also of the brutality and violence inherent in the king's exercise of power.

The elaboration of the image of the king as a great victor in war and as a punisher of his subjects was increasingly balanced by a new equation of the king with the religious domain. The close relationship between the king and the religious sphere was highlighted in inscriptions as well as coins, but royal religious patronage was usually multidirectional. As we shall see in the following chapters, land grants, too, were associated with threats of karmic retribution and war. The king's increasing association with the religious domain seems to have played an important role in justifying and masking the

violence inherent in kingship.

CHAPTER THREE

Maturity

An imposing scene carved in relief in a cave at Udayagiri near Vidisha in central India has inspired many different interpretations. In the central part of the niche, we see Vishnu in his boar (Varaha) incarnation rescuing the earth goddess Prithvi from the waters (see Figure 6). The god, shown with the broad, muscular body of a man and the head of a boar, dominates and exudes masculine power. His right hand is placed on his hip and his left one on his bent knee. A massive garland is flung around his body. The diminutive goddess Earth clings to his tusks. Vishnu's left foot rests on the hoods of a serpent deity, who gazes up at him, his hands folded in obeisance. The great god is flanked by sages and celestial beings, and the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna are part of the scene. Behind the serpent deity is the broken torso of a human figure. Does this figure represent the Gupta king Samudragupta or Chandragupta II, or a feudatory ruler, presented as a devotee of the great god? Or could it be that the powerful Varaha represents the king? Or is there deliberate ambiguity, Varaha representing both deity and king? In the fifth century, water cascading down from a cistern on top of the rocky outcrop made its way through a central path cut into the rock cluster all the way down to the cave floor, where it lapped the base of the magnificent image of the great god raising the earth up from the ocean.[1]

6 Detail of Varaha relief panel, Udayagiri

Photograph: Upinder Singh

The Udayagiri complex was created during the reign of the Gupta king Chandragupta II (circa 376–413 / 415 CE). While the center of

the Gupta empire was located far away, perhaps at Pataliputra (Patna) or Prayaga (Allahabad), military campaigns brought the Guptas to central India. Although Vishnu in his various forms dominates Udayagiri, other Hindu gods are also represented, and there is a Jaina shrine as well. An inscription refers to the excavation of a shrine of Vishnu by a feudatory of Chandragupta II. Another records the gift of a cave dedicated to Shiva by Virasena, a resident of Pataliputra and a minister of the king. Not far from Udayagiri, traces of the Guptas are found at the Buddhist monastery complex at Sanchi, where Chandragupta II made a grant of land and money along with his military commander Amrakardava. The Udayagiri caves display the crafting of a powerful, carefully conceptualized, and executed statement of image and word, expressing the arrival of a bold new vision of kingship and a new kind of religiosity, both intertwined.[2] The Gupta inscription at Sanchi indicates that in spite of these developments, the donative policy of political elites continued to be multidirectional.

The new political and religious developments are also visible in Vakataka territory in central-western India. Here, at Ramagiri (Ramtek hill), not far from the royal residence at Nandivardhana, were found the remains of a royal Vakataka ritual center. This consisted of seven temples dedicated to Vishnu in his various incarnations, including the Kevala Narasimha temple, which may been a memorial shrine built in memory of queen Prabhavatigupta by her daughter and son.[3] During the reign of the fifth-century king Pravarasena II, the Vakataka capital was moved to Pravarapura, which seems to have been located not far from Ramagiri at the site of Mansar.[4] Here, excavations on a mound known as Hidimba Tekdi revealed the remains of what may have been a palace complex (Figure 7). Nearby was a Shiva temple, probably named Pravareshvara after the king. A startling discovery in the foundations of the temple complex was a large clay figure of a man with a hole in his breast. This “Man of Mansar” seems to represent a novel construction ritual embodying ideas of human sacrifice to ward off evil spirits. The site also revealed a brick shaft containing a pot with funerary remains; perhaps it was a royal funerary monument of the powerful Vakataka queen Prabhavatigupta. Mansar indicates an integrated royal, residential, ceremonial, and religious center with a complex level of conceptualization, planning, and execution.

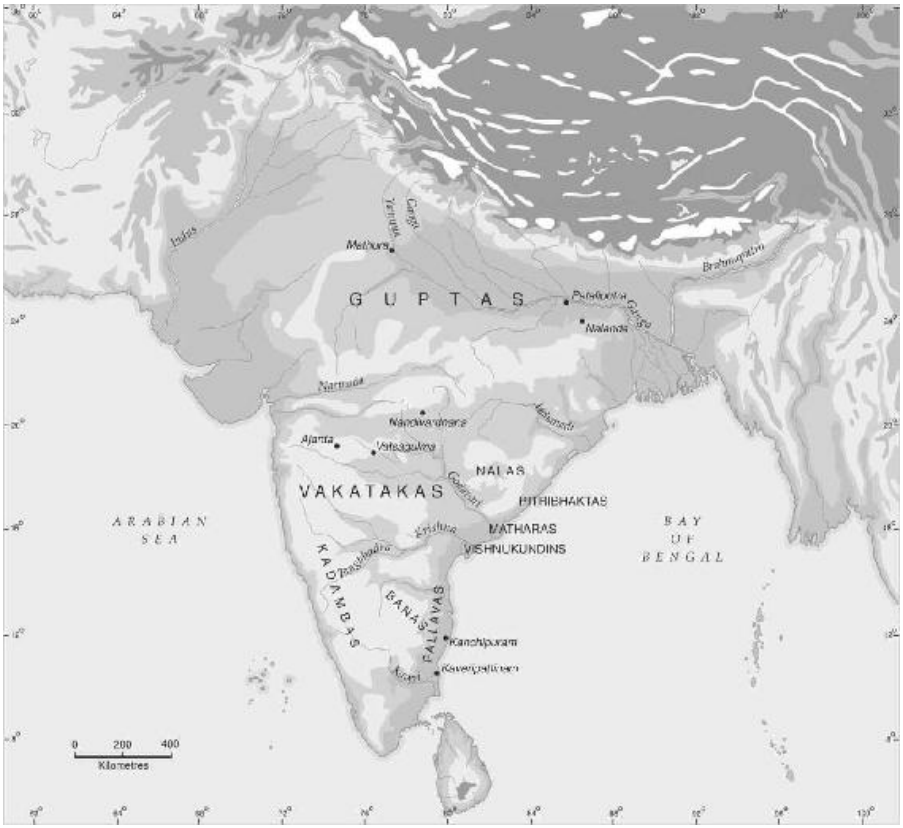
7 The ruins of Mansar

Photograph: Hans T. Bakker

The imagery and remains at Udayagiri and Mansar articulate a new vision of political power, in which kingship and sectarian religion were united. It was a sectarianism in which the personal deity of the ruler or his family—either Vishnu or Shiva—was elevated and given prominence, but did not ignore other deities or faiths. This is largely because of the monolatrous nature of the Hindu cults in which, even when a particular deity was accorded a supreme position, other gods and goddesses were also acknowledged and honored. Buddhism and Jainism also had their constellations of multiple foci of worship—various Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the case of the former and the twenty-three *tīrthaṅkara*s and other saints in the latter. The sectarianism that emerged in the political sphere during this period was an inclusive one, accommodating a variety of elements—a situation that is often referred to as one of "tolerance," but which should rather be described as an inclusive sectarianism.[5]

The Gupta–Vakataka age was once seen as a classical age marked by empire-building and great achievements in literature and the arts. From the 1960s onward, it was described by some historians as the beginning of a feudal age marked by political and economic fragmentation, largely the result of royal land grants. A more

convincing perspective is that these centuries were marked by a sustained process of intensive state formation in different parts of the subcontinent.[6] To use Kautilya's terminology, we see several "circles of kings" within which relations of paramountcy and feudatory status —ever in a state of flux—were expressed through an epigraphic vocabulary that seems to have spread like wildfire. The two major circles of kings were those of the Guptas in the north and the Vakatakas (of the Nandivardhana and Vatsagulma branches) in the western Deccan (Map 4).[7] The marriage of the Gupta princess Prabhavatigupta to the Vakataka prince Rudrasena II connected the two great dynasties through a matrimonial alliance. Prabhavatigupta exercised power and authority during the reigns of her husband, Rudrasena II, and sons, Damodarasena and Prithvisena II. After her death, the Gupta-Vakataka alliance seems to have been replaced by rivalry and conflict.[8] During the period of Gupta and Vakataka ascendency and decline, areas like Orissa and Andhra saw the beginnings of a sustained process of state formation.[9] In the far south, a period of social and political dislocation associated with a people called the Kalabhras made way for the ascendency of the Pandyas, Pallavas, and Chalukyas. The Guptas repulsed a Huna (Hephtalite) invasion, but in the late fifth / early sixth century, the Huna Toramana succeeded in establishing his control over parts of northern and western India. Intra-dynastic conflicts, as well as inter-dynastic wars and invasions are intrinsic to the political history of circa 300–600 CE.



MAP 4 The Guptas, Vakatakas, and their contemporaries

From Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India from the Stone Age to the 12th century;* Courtesy: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.

The Puranas constructed a systematic connected political memory of ancient Indian dynasties, beginning from the flood of Manu and the origins of the solar and lunar dynasties. These texts envision the subcontinent as a geographical, political, and cultural macro-unit. From a mythical past, the Puranas move into the historic period, giving a terse, synoptic account of the dynasties of what they call the Kali age, an evil age marked by impiety, social disorder, violence, and killing, believed to have begun after the death of Krishna, twenty years after the *Mahabharata* war. The accounts of what we would consider the historical dynasties begin with the early kings of Magadha and go up to the Guptas. Although the Puranic dynastic accounts are presented as a prophecy, they represent a later age looking back at an older time.

The fact that this subcontinental political perspective emerged just

after the third century is significant, because it is during this very period that we see the emergence of what can be called a classical ideal of Indian kingship. The ideas were not new. What was new was the universality and confidence with which they were expressed in texts, inscriptions, and art. Also new was the imprint left by kingship on the religious landscape, not as monumental as in later centuries, but marked by a level of sophistication not seen before.[10] At the same time, the emergence of a standard template of kingship left room for difference in detail and emphasis.

The royal inscriptions of this period include eulogies, donative inscriptions (usually on stone) to temples, and land grants (usually on copper plates) to Brahmanas. All three types of epigraphs show a close interweaving of political and religious ideas, especially those related to Vaishnavism and Shaivism, indicating a significant development of the institution of the Hindu temple. *Praśasti*s expressed an increasingly homogenized ideology of kingship, one that was visible to literate subjects, disseminated orally in the course of ceremonial readings, and potentially accessible to ideologues of other dynasties. The geographical spread of an increasingly homogeneous epigraphic expression of political power and religiosity, now largely couched in Sanskrit, was the work of intrepid Brahmanas who were fanning out and occupying influential positions in royal courts as ritual experts, advisers, crafters of genealogies, and panegyrists. Some of them were also beneficiaries of what was becoming an increasingly prevalent royal policy—the making of land grants associated with tax exemptions. The royally endowed Brahmana village (known as *brahmadeya* or *agrahāra*) became an important part of the political and rural landscape. The king–Brahmana alliance took on new shape and played an important role in the legitimation of kingship and political violence.

Kings, Brahmanas, and Temples in Vakataka Kingship

Most of the Vakataka inscriptions—those of the main line as well as the Vatsagulma branch—are written in Sanskrit prose.[11] Interestingly, those of their ministers and feudatories are partly or entirely in verse. Vakataka kings usually have the epithet *mahārāja* (great king), and on occasion, *samrāṭ* (emperor). Although portrayed as heroes, they are described as Brahmanas belonging to the Vishnuvriddha gotra. Along with other dynasties, such as the earlier Shungas and Satavahanas and the later Pallavas, this signals a departure from the epic model which connected kingship with the Kshatriya. "Kshatriya" continued to be a status claimed by certain lineages who had managed to wrest political power, but as shown by the inscriptions of the Vakatakas and others, it was not the only one. Apart from their claims to being Brahmanas, a strong Brahmanical element in Vakataka kingship is visible in various other respects as well. Some of the Ajanta caves seem to have been excavated during the time of king Harishena, but there is no epigraphic evidence of direct Vakataka patronage.

A distinct vocabulary of political hierarchy emerged, and a subordinate king or feudatory is routinely described as one who meditates at the feet of his overlord. But hierarchies were not rigid or immutable. While the Vakataka king stood at the apex of his "circle of kings," other members of the political elite appear as proud, not abject, subordinates. The eulogies of subordinate kings often imitate the phraseology of their overlords and sometimes outdo them. For instance, in the Bamhani plates of the feudatory Bharatabala, this feudatory is given much more elaborate and fulsome praise than his Vakataka overlord. At Ajanta and in the Ghatotkacha cave nearby, inscriptions speak of lavish religious endowments made by wealthy and powerful ministers such as Varahadeva. In fact, while the Vakataka ruling houses directed their patronage toward Brahmanas and temples, other members of the political elite patronized Buddhist monasteries.

In their inscriptions, several Vakataka kings are given the title Dharmamahārāja (the great king of dharma). Kings are eulogized as having established the Krita yuga (the most perfect age) on earth. There is a pointed declaration of sectarian affiliation, Shaiva or Vaishnava. The king is projected as the *foremost* devotee of a

particular god—*parama-bhāgavata* (the foremost devotee of the lord, that is, Vasudeva–Krishna) or *parama-māheśvara* (the foremost devotee of the great god Shiva). This is accompanied by the idea that the king had won royal fortune through the grace of that particular god. Vakataka kings also proclaim their performance of grand Vedic sacrifices, often more than once. These sacrifices were occasions when political power, paramountcy, and liberality to Brahmanas could be advertised. One of the early kings, Pravarasena I, is described in his successors' inscriptions as a performer of seven Soma sacrifices and four *aśvamedhas*.[12] The Puranas refer to his having made liberal gifts to Brahmanas at his performance of the *vājapeya* sacrifice.

Epic elements, especially from the *Ramayana,* surface in several places in Vakataka history. King Pravarasena II is supposed to have composed the *Setubandha,* a Prakrit *kāvya* about Rama. Prithivishena I is described in inscriptions as striving to follow Yudhishthira's model. The Ajanta cave inscription of the minister Varahadeva describes the Vakataka king Harishena as one

> who in beauty, resembled Hari [Vishnu], Rama, Hara [Shiva], Smara [the god of love], and the moon, and who was brave and spirited like a lion.[13]

The Ghatotkacha inscription of the minister Varahadeva refers to a Brahmana minister named Deva, who was proficient in governance (*naya*), and tells us that the king performed his pious (*dharmya*) duties under his guidance as Partha (Arjuna) did under Krishna's.[14]

In line with the spread of the temple-based Hindu cults, kings and feudatories feature in Vakataka inscriptions as temple builders. As mentioned above, Pravarasena built a Shiva temple, significantly named Pravareshvara after himself. This practice of naming Shiva *liṅgas* (the phallic emblems of the god) and temples after donors took off in the post–fourth-century period and continued thereafter. Although not confined to royalty, within the political context, it reveals the heightening of the sectarian associations of kingship. Nevertheless, although most of the Vakataka kings were worshippers of Shiva, the remains from Vakataka sites reveal many Vaishnava elements as well. As mentioned above, the ruins of seven Vaishnava temples have been discovered on Ramagiri hill. Relief panels found in the area depict scenes from the life of the epic hero Rama, including

the encounter between Sugriva and Vali.[15] Although the identification of the sculptures found at the Shiva temple site described above are at present tentative, it is possible that some of them may represent scenes from the *Ramayana.*[16] So the sectarianism of the Vakatakas was inclusive, not exclusive or exclusionary.

Poetry is a new addition to the political discourse. A few Vakataka kings are associated with the writing and patronage of Prakrit and Sanskrit poetry. Sarvasena, a ruler of the Vatsagulma branch, is famous as the writer of the celebrated Prakrit *kāvya Harivijaya* and some of his verses occur in the poetic anthology, the *Gathasaptashati.* Pravarasena II is considered author of the *Setubandha,* a much-acclaimed Prakrit *kāvya* about Rama's conflict with Ravana, which emphasizes Rama's great heroism and the sentiments of love, loyalty, and devotion. The first canto tells us that Pravarasena had started to write this work soon after his accession. In this rendering of Rama's story, Ravana's younger brother Vibhishana has a prominent role and is given several dramatic lines expressing his grief at Ravana's death. Hans T. Bakker suggests that this may reflect an autobiographical element. We know that Pravarasena was not his father's eldest son, and his two older brothers, Divakarasena and Damodarasena, evidently did not ascend the throne. Pravarasena may have put into Vibhishana's mouth sentiments that he might have himself experienced after his success in a violent fratricidal struggle for the throne.[17] The Mandhal inscription of king Prithivishena II tells us that his father Narendrasena had initially succeeded to the royal fortune of his house, but that it was taken away from him by a kinsman. These sorts of poetic allusions are the closest we get to the intra-dynastic political violence of the time.

Royal land grants acquired a political performative aspect in this period. The Pandhurna plates of Pravarasena II, which record a grant to several Brahmanas issued from the temple (*devakula*) of Pravareshvara, tell us that the grant was made with libations of water at the king's victorious place of worship.[18] An additional gift of land to the Brahmana Somarya was made at this place of worship (*dharma-sthāna*), for the well-being of the king in this and his future life, accompanied by the recitation of sacred texts and libations of sesame seeds, which suggests that the grant coincided with a *śrāddha* ceremony for the king's ancestors.

Formulaic references threatening punishment start appearing regularly in royal land grant inscriptions. The imprecatory verses,

which threaten kings who revoke a grant or cause any kind of trouble to the recipients, cite the authority of Vyasa, the traditional author of the *Mahabharata:*

> He who takes away land given by himself or another, earns the sin of killing a hundred thousand cows.
>
> A giver of land enjoys happiness in heaven for 60,000 years; the one who seizes land or acquiesces in its seizure goes to hell.

In this manner, the relatively recent trend of kings making land grants associated with fiscal exemptions and privileges anchored itself firmly to the authority of the venerable *Mahabharata* tradition. A powerful threat of karmic retribution emphasized the inviolability of the king's decrees.

A Vakataka inscription makes an unusual association between the king and punishment. The Chammak copper plate of Pravarasena II, which records the gift of Charmanka village to one thousand Brahmanas, states that this grant was to last as long as the sun and the moon endured. But it adds the caveat that the grant would last as long as the Brahmanas in question committed no treason (*droha*) against the kingdom consisting of seven elements; that they were not found guilty of the murder of a Brahmana, theft, or adultery; that they did not wage war (*saṁgrāma*); and that they did not harm other villages. If they did any of these things, a king would commit no theft if he took the land away from them. This inscription suggests the possibility that Brahmanas patronized by the king were capable of presenting a violent threat to society and to the king. As we shall see in Chapter 4, land grants were connected with political violence in more than one way.

The Gupta Model of the Paramount King

Mention has already been made of the new and sophisticated articulation of Gupta kingship at Udayagiri through the skillful use of double entendre. The imperial Guptas were not as enthusiastic about making land grants to Brahmanas as were their feudatories and the Vakataka kings, but their inscriptions and coins announced the new ideal of kingship even more forcefully. Gupta inscriptions are often dated in an era (319–20 CE) that probably marked the accession of Chandragupta I. The literary quality of the royal *praśasti* increases, as can be seen in the Mehrauli iron pillar inscription of Chandra (probably Chandragupta II) and the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. Allusions to intra-dynastic conflicts lurk behind the skipping of certain kings (for instance Kachagupta and Ramagupta) in the Gupta genealogies. On rare occasion, there is admission of serious trouble, as in the case of the Bhitari inscription of Skandagupta, which mentions his repulsing a Huna invasion and refers three times to his having reestablished his tottering lineage or sovereignty of his house.[19]

Gupta inscriptions reflect changes in the vocabulary of political relationships and the emergence of certain formulaic expressions of paramountcy and subordination that were to remain fairly stable over the next few centuries. From Kumaragupta's reign, the three titles that became emblematic of claims to paramountcy were *parama-daivata* (the supreme worshipper of a god or the gods), *parama-bhaṭṭāraka* (the supreme lord), and *mahārājādhirāja* (the great king of kings). References to subordinate kings bowing their heads at the lotus-like feet of their overlord became commonplace. However, as we have seen in the case of Vakataka inscriptions, the pecking order was a fluid one. "Subordinate" kings were often powerful in their own realms and made grand, eloquent epigraphic pronouncements about their power and achievements. They may not have assumed the highest titles, but they shared many of the qualities of their overlords. It was a participatory kingship.

Inscriptions abound in associating kings with the gods, and Chandragupta II and Kumaragupta I have the epithet *parama-bhāgavata,* announcing them as the greatest worshippers of Vasudeva-Krishna. The sculpted image of the king, which had appeared

fleetingly in the previous centuries, disappears, but reappears in a new garb, often inspired by and associated with Vaishnavism. Double entendre associating a great king with a great god, seen at Udayagiri, was favored in inscriptions, art, and texts. Numismatic portrayals match the epigraphic descriptions of Gupta kings as all-rounders, advertising them as unmatched warriors of extraordinary physical strength and prowess, performers of great sacrifices, ones who had achieved great fame, hunters and killers of powerful animals, ones who are favored by the goddess Shri, wielders of the rod of justice, and devotees of deities.[20] The *garuḍa* banner (the emblem of the god Vishnu) appears on many coins. The goddess Lakshmi unites ideas of fertility, wealth, and kingship. She appears standing, sitting, walking, and holding a lotus, cornucopia, and / or diadem; in some cases, she sprinkles coins. A coin of Skandagupta has an interesting variation: The king stands with a female figure *next* to him; the fact that she is holding a lotus suggests that she is no ordinary consort but the goddess Lakshmi herself.[21]

In the Gupta empire, coins functioned as a more eloquent medium of royal communication and propaganda than ever before, and their outreach was much greater than that of the royal *praśasti*s. On Kushana coins, kings usually stand stiffly in front of an altar, holding a spear, standard, or trident. The image of the king on Gupta coinage is, in comparison, extremely varied. Realism is not usually the aim, as the same king is often shown with rather different facial and physical features. We often see the king nimbate (with a halo around his head) in three-quarter or profile view. He is shown either with a slender figure or with pronounced musculature, the latter often found on coins where he is portrayed as a warrior or shown killing a powerful animal. The obverse of the coins usually bear the name of the king, and the reverse his *biruda,* or epithet. The latter, sometimes in metrical form, expresses the significance of the visual portrayals in words. The figural representations and epithets are dramatic and vigorous. Samudragupta and Kumaragupta I are also portrayed as musicians.

Some Gupta coins commemorate important political events. For instance, a coin portrays and announces the names of Chandragupta I and his wife, Kumaradevi. On the reverse is the goddess Lakshmi and the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* (of the Lichchhavis). This coin type may have been issued by Chandragupta himself or by his son Samudragupta, but what is significant is the fact that it advertises an

important matrimonial alliance between the Guptas and a princess belonging to the Lichchhavi confederacy. The narrative, commemorative aspect of Gupta coinage is also evident in one of Samudragupta's coin types. We see a horse on the obverse, and on the reverse a queen holding a standard and fly-whisk. The legend (*Aśvamedha-parākrama* or *Hayamedha-parākrama*) announces that the king had demonstrated his prowess by the performance of the great horse sacrifice.[22] This can be read along with the references in the inscriptions of Prabhavatigupta to Samudragupta having performed several *aśvamedhas,* and in those of Kumaragupta and Budhagupta to Samudragupta's restoration of the *aśvamedha* that had long decayed (*cirotsanna*), that is, gone out of vogue.[23] The claim to have restored the great Vedic sacrifices became an important part of the claim to political preeminence.

An enigmatic narrative coin belongs to Kumaragupta's time. We see the king standing, flanked by a male and female figure; on the reverse Lakshmi sits on the lotus, and there is a legend *Apratigha* (Invincible), referring to the king. Does the scene on the obverse represent the installation of young Kumaragupta as king? Or does it depict the queen and crown prince trying to persuade the king not to renounce the world? It is impossible to know for sure.

One of the most interesting reflections of the process of sophisticated synthesis in the ideas of kingship in the Gupta period is a rare coin type of Chandragupta II.[24] We see Chakrapurusha, a personification of the *cakravartin*'s wheel, offering three small pellet-like objects to the king, who stands to his left. These possibly represent the three powers of the king—the power of lordship, energy and counsel. The king accepts them with his right hand while his left hand rests on his sword. On the reverse is a goddess standing on and holding a lotus, and the epithet *Cakravikrama* expresses a combination of the idea of the king's prowess and the wheel. We may note that the wheel is also one of the attributes of the god Vishnu and many of the Gupta emperors are described as devotees of this god. One symbol encapsulates many ideas.

The single most important document from the point of view of the ideology of Gupta kingship, especially with regard to political violence, is the Allahabad *praśasti* of Samudragupta.[25] This inscription has often been used by historians as a source of information on Samudragupta's military campaigns, and a great deal of energy has been devoted to the identification of the rulers and places mentioned

in it in order to identify the contours and nature of the Gupta empire. However, it is equally, if not more, important to recognize the representational aspect of the Allahabad inscription from the point of view of political ideology.

Sheldon Pollock has perceptively pointed out that the Allahabad inscription heralds a new imperial idea that was both quasi-universal and projected within a specified geopolitical space.[26] When considered as part of a continuing process of the evolution of the ideology of kingship, although it has certain important novel features, the inscription reflects an exceptionally sophisticated *synthesis* of various elements of kingship drawn from earlier times, couched in superior Sanskrit verse and prose. This continuity is heralded in a remarkable way by the fact that Samudragupta's inscription is inscribed on a pillar that also bears several Ashokan inscriptions (the six pillar edicts and minor pillar edicts 1 and 3).[27] Interestingly, the pillar also bears an inscription of the sixteenth-century Mughal emperor Jahangir. Ashoka's inscriptions reflect his personal ideas expressed in a personal voice. The Allahabad *praśasti* of Samudragupta is a soliloquy of power in which kingship talks about itself, through the voice of its composer, a high-ranking minister named Harishena.

The expression of royal power in this inscription is much more vigorous, elaborate, and grandiose than that found in the inscriptions of Kharavela and Rudradaman, which we have looked at in Chapter 2. Kharavela and Rudradaman were eulogized in their inscriptions in Prakrit and Sanskrit prose, respectively. The Gupta rulers are the first Indian kings to be eulogized in a combination of poetic verse and prose. During circa 300–600 CE, poetry was increasingly used in royal panegyric in the preface and epilogue of land grant inscriptions, and as an attribute of ideal kingship.

The Allahabad pillar inscription consists of thirty-three lines which comprise two long sentences—the first consists of eight verses (lines 1–16), the second of a prose passage and a verse (lines 17–30)—followed by a short concluding prose section. The inscription, in the vigorous Gaudi style, is marked by high literary quality and uses four poetic meters. Harishena uses poetic ornaments (*alaṁkāras*) such as alliteration (*anuprāsa*), comparison (*upamā*), hyperbole (*atiśayokti*), and double entendre (*śleṣa*). The heroic and furious "flavors" (*vīra* and *raudra rasas*) predominate, although, as we shall see, there is also a highlighting of the king's pacific attributes.[28] Harishena accomplishes the incredible feat of creating a detailed, vivid, and powerful poetic

portrait of a great king in two long sentences.

The epigraph was clearly written at a late stage in Samudragupta's reign, when he had already achieved most of what he was to achieve, both militarily and otherwise (except his *aśvamedha*). We will begin our analysis of this important inscription toward its end.[29] In the naming of the parents, grandfather, and great-grandfather of the king (lines 28–30), we see the incorporation of elements of hierarchy via the use of epithets. The first two Gupta kings have the epithets *śrī* and *mahārāja,* while Chandragupta and Samudragupta are given the grander title of *mahārājādhirāja*—the great king of kings. Harishena situates Samudragupta within his lineage, but subtly indicates that he surpassed his predecessors in his greatness and achievements.

In offering information about himself, the composer of the Allahabad *praśasti* is loquacious compared with other epigraphic composers. Toward the end of the inscription, after dilating on the greatness and glory of the emperor Samudragupta, Harishena describes his composition as a *kāvya,* and offers several details about himself. He was

> a slave [*dāsa*] at the feet of his lord [Samudragupta]; one whose mind had expanded due to the favor [*anugraha*] of proximity to him.[30]

He was an inhabitant of a place called Khadyatapaka and a high-ranking official in the royal court, bearing the titles of *sandhivigrahika, kumārāmātya* and *mahādaṇḍanāyaka.* This man of substance had an illustrious parentage—his father, Dhruvabhuti, was a *mahādaṇḍanāyaka.* The executor of the composition was also a high-ranking official—the *mahādaṇḍanāyaka* Tilabhattaka, described as one who meditated at the feet of the great lord, the emperor. The idea of servitude was transformed into a badge of privilege and honor, and such formulations swiftly became standard in political discourse.

The literary quality of the Allahabad pillar inscription is accompanied by strong emotional content. The fourth verse suggests that Samudragupta's father selected him and handed over the reins of power to him in his lifetime. But it expresses this in words loaded with high emotional quotient. Harishena paints a dramatic court scene: In the midst of the august assembly, we see the discerning father who had recognized his most worthy successor, embracing the prince,

engulfed in extreme feeling and excitement. His eyes are filled with tears of joy; the hair of his body stand on end. “Come, oh worthy one,” he says to Samudragupta, “protect thus the whole earth.” Rival claimants gaze on the scene with sad faces, while the high-ranking members of the court (no doubt relieved that a possible violent struggle for succession had been averted) breathe cheerfully. Did the father walk off into the forest after handing over the reins of power to his son? We do not know.

Harishena describes Samudragupta’s military victories in a manner that suggests a high level of political strategy and presents the Gupta empire as the paramount center of a complex circle of kings (the details will be discussed in Chapter 4). But the description of the king’s wars and victories (which historians have endlessly obsessed over) take up only nine out of the thirty-three lines of the inscription. The first two verses are too fragmentary to be made out, so we do not know how Harishena chose to introduce his composition and the emperor. But the third heralds Samudragupta not as a conqueror but as a great intellectual and a poet,

> whose mind is suffused with happiness as a result of his association with the wise; who is thus accustomed to retaining the truth and purpose of the *śāstras* …; who, having removed the obstacles to the grace of good poetry through the injunction of excellence clustered together by the experts, enjoys in the world of intellectuals, in an attractive manner, kingship [*rājya*], as a result of fame for writing copious lucid poetry.

Harishena repeatedly emphasizes the king’s intellectual and poetic talents and accomplishments. We are told that Samudragupta’s wise words are worthy of study. He is a king among poets (*kavirāja*), whose compositions surpass the glory of the genius of poets and are a source of inspiration to the learned. He puts Brihaspati (the preceptor of the gods) to shame by his sharp and polished intellect and Tumburu and Narada with his fine musical performances. Samudragupta represents the model of a warrior-king who is also an intellectual, poet, and musician.[31]

The king’s martial ferocity is tempered with great benevolence. He is a good man who had performed many good deeds, one whose tender heart could be captured only through devotion and humility.

He is compassionate and attends to the uplift of the poor, miserable, and suffering. He is generous, a giver of many hundreds of thousands of cows. He embodies kindness to mankind. Further, the king is the enclosing structure, that is, a maintainer, of dharma. Harishena exclaims,

> What excellence is there which does not belong to him! He alone is worthy of the contemplation of the learned.[32]

The Samudragupta of Harishena's inscription is not a man; he is a superman. His extraordinary qualities are emphasized through hyperbole and analogies with the gods. Reminding us of the king of the *Manusmriti* and the *Mahabharata,* he is described as the equal of the gods Kubera, Varuna, Indra, and Yama. More striking is Harishena's use of double entendre (*śleṣa*) to compare Samudragupta with the god Vishnu. He is inscrutable (Achintya); he is Purusha, the cause of the prosperity of the good and the destruction of the bad. Like Vishnu's, his heart can be won through devotion (*bhakti*). He is a human being in his performance of the rites and conventions of the world; otherwise he is a god (*deva*) who resides in this world.

The violence of Samudragupta's military career is masked in a eulogy of his extraordinary fame. Harishena describes the pillar on which the epigraph is inscribed (lines 28–30) as a raised arm of the earth that proclaims the king's fame, which, having risen up through his conquest of the whole earth and pervaded its entire surface, has moved gracefully to the abode of the lord of the gods (Indra). There are other references, too, to the king's great fame. Verse 3 speaks of the fame that the king had acquired on account of his poetry. Another verse tells us that his multifaceted sprouting fame was as bright as the moon's rays. We are also told that the king's fame had exhausted itself by journeying over the whole world as a result of his restoration of many fallen kingdoms and overthrown royal families. Samudragupta's fame was the result of his victory over the whole earth (*sarva-pṛthivī-vijaya*) (line 29). But this fame did not stem from the king's martial achievements alone. He had wiped off the fame of other kings with the soles of his feet through his many good qualities and good acts. Samudragupta's great fame

> ever ascending higher and higher, and traveling by many paths

—generosity, prowess, tranquility, the recitation of the *śāstras*—purifies the three worlds, like the white water of the Ganga river surges forth irresistibly when freed from its confinement in the inner cave of the matted hair of Pashupati [Shiva].[33]

Here, with striking imagery suggestive of dynamic movement and potential for purification, the power of the ascending fame of the king is compared with the power of the descent of the Ganga from the god Shiva's matted locks. Both are tremendous.

Such a magnificent poetic composition about a magnificent king could be expected to result in great fame, both for the king and the poet. Perhaps the inscription was read out on special occasions marked by political ceremony. News of the contents of this brilliant composition inscribed on a majestic stone pillar must have reached the ears of other kings. But what is interesting is that the Allahabad inscription implies something more. Harishena states that he had composed this inscription for the welfare and happiness of all beings (*sarva-bhūta-hita-sukhāya*). This is the sort of sentiment that turns up in different kinds of contexts. It was the goal that Ashoka spoke about in his edicts. It also occurs in many Buddhist and Jaina donative inscriptions where many donors express the hope that the merit accruing from their gift should benefit all living beings. In the Allahabad pillar inscription, the idea of merit is transplanted into the political and poetic contexts. The implication is not only that the poet's praise of the king would lead to spreading the fame of both, far and wide. This praise could translate into something greater—the welfare and happiness of all beings.

The *Nitisara:* A Political Treatise for Mature Monarchies

Analyses of Indian political ideas tend to focus on the *Arthashastra,* but an important work on politics—the *Nitisara*—was written during the period of the decline of the Gupta empire or in its immediate aftermath. Estimates of the age of this text generally range between the first and seventh centuries CE,[34] but can be narrowed down to between circa 500 and 700 CE. This Sanskrit verse treatise, consisting of twenty *sargas* (cantos) subdivided into thirty-six *prakaraṇas* (sections), was written by a man named Kamandaka.[35] Generally regarded as a derivative, unoriginal thinker who simply parroted Kautilya's ideas, sometimes incorrectly, Kamandaka has been largely ignored by scholars. However, the *Nitisara* should be recognized as an important political treatise with a distinct perspective, which, like the *Arthashastra,* acquired an authoritative reputation, not only within India, but also in Southeast Asia.[36]

Like the *Arthashastra,* the *Nitisara* was composed by a Brahmana political theorist who was probably closely involved in contemporary politics. Within its normative discourse, we can see the author grappling with pressing issues of his time, including unbridled and unsatiated royal ambitions, endemic war, and violence. The text situates itself as part of a longer *śāstric* tradition. Kamandaka refers to the collective wisdom of the experts as well as to specific schools and authorities, expressing his agreement or disagreement with them.[37] While Brihaspati is the most frequently cited authority, it is Vishnugupta, alias Kautilya, the author of the *Arthashastra*—referred to on two occasions as "our guru"[38]—who holds the preeminent position for Kamandaka. The text opens with a salutation to the god Ganesha, the king, and Vishnugupta.[39] The eulogy of Vishnugupta describes him as one who was born in a great lineage with descendants who had attained worldwide renown for their sage-like conduct in not accepting gifts of any kind; who was as effulgent as the sacrificial fire; who was so well-versed in the Vedas that he had mastered through his intellect all four as though they were one; who through his powers, as irresistible as furious thunder, had uprooted the great and powerful Nandas; who, like the god Shaktidhara (Karttikeya), through the exercise of his power of counsel (*mantra-*

śakti), had single-handedly secured the world for Chandragupta, the moon among men; who was learned and had produced the nectar of *nītiśāstra* out of the mighty ocean of *arthaśāstra*. *Nītiśāstra* and *arthaśāstra* both refer to the science of statecraft or politics, but Kamandaka seems to suggest that the latter had broader connotations; as we have seen, in Kautilya's work, *arthaśāstra* is actually the discipline of political economy. Kamandaka's description of Vishnugupta can be read as a portrait of the political Brahmana, the sort of adviser considered by Kamandaka to be most suited (and most likely) to deliver a teaching on politics. It is a self-portrait.

The *Nitisara* is a pared-down version of the *Arthashastra.* Kautilya's detailed discussion of internal administration and civil and criminal law are absent, as is the advocacy of strict state control over various aspects of the economy. This reflects the narrower scope of work, as well as differences in the authors' views about the potential state. Both Kamandaka and Kautilya were concerned with political expansion and consolidation, but the *Nitisara* does not share the *Arthashastra*'s grandiose vision of state power. Neither does it share the *Arthashastra*'s faith in the efficacy of black magic as a political and military tool (there is no detailed discussion of this in the *Nitisara*). And, as we shall see later, Kamandaka also disagreed with Kautilya on various specific issues related to the interface between kingship and violence. Times had changed, and the perspectives of the two political thinkers differed.

Among the four branches of knowledge, the *Nitisara* asserts the preeminence of *daṇḍanīti* (the science of politics).[40] Nevertheless, as we shall see, its ideas about politics are imbued with philosophical, ethical, and metaphysical presuppositions, in fact more so than the *Arthashastra.* The *Nitisara* variously describes its subject of inquiry as *nīti* (governance, explained as derived from *nayana,* leading or administering), *daṇḍanīti* (the science of politics or governance), and *rājavidyā* (the science of ruling). The scope of *nīti* (governance) is narrower than the *artha* (political economy) of the *Arthashastra.* Kamandaka discusses the principles according to which a king should rule his kingdom and how he could attain political paramountcy as well as prosperity for himself and his subjects. He talks about the intimate connection between kingship (*rājatā*) and the prosperity of the king, his realm, and his subjects. But the work is not obsessed with material gain in the manner that the *Arthashastra* is.

Monarchy is the only kind of state mentioned by Kamandaka. After their annihilation by Samudragupta, the oligarchies were no longer worth talking about. The prime subject as well as audience for the *Nitisara* was the king (*rājan*), whose epithets announce him as lord of the earth, of all men, and of the *maṇḍalas* (circles of kings).[41] The *Nitisara* and the *Arthashastra* both address an ambitious and upwardly mobile king, desirous of attaining political paramountcy—the *vijigīṣu.* The king of the *Nitisara* seeks dominion over the whole earth girded by the ocean. He is a great victor, who plants his foot on the heads of enemies adorned with excellent helmets and bejeweled crowns.[42] Kamandaka frequently compares the king with the gods, especially with Indra, Yama, and Prajapati. His work abounds in references to legendary warriors and kings—Parashurama, Ambarisha, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Nala, Janamejaya, and Rama. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* traditions were more important in Kamandaka's political discourse than in the *Arthashastra.*

The polity of the *Nitisara* and the *Arthashastra* is an organic one, where the king is embedded in a web of complex, reciprocal relationships with the other elements of the state. Kamandaka lists these as the king (*svāmin*), counselor (*amātya*), domain (*rāṣṭra*), fort (*durga*), treasury (*kośa*), military (*bala*), and ally (*suḥṛt*).[43] This more or less matches Kautilya's list in substance, with slight modifications in terminology—*janapada* is replaced by *rāṣṭra, daṇḍa* by *bala,* and *mitra* by *suhṛt.* It is interesting that Kamandaka cites Brihaspati rather than Kautilya as the authority on the seven elements of the kingdom.[44]

Being a successful king required many inherent and cultivated qualities and a great deal of effort. Kamandaka's long list of qualities that the king should possess (there are similarities with the *Arthashastra*) reveals an important aim of the political theorists—to temper brute power with virtue. The qualities necessary to become a successful king include nobility of ancestry, intelligence, truthfulness, and powers of endurance. The most important qualities, however, are prowess (*pratāpa*), energy (*utsāha*), and constant vigilance. Although many of the virtues desirable in a king are described as inborn, they are actually cultivable; what is implied is that there is difference between a king and one worthy of kingship.

By now, the four expedients (*upāyas*) of royal power—conciliation (*sāma*), giving gifts (*dāna*), force (*daṇḍa*), and creating dissension (*bheda*)—were a standard part of political discourse. Kamandaka speaks of the need to use these judiciously in order to generate and maintain confidence (*viśvāsa*) in the various elements of the state. Confidence was an essential prerequisite for eliciting loyalty and love (*anurāga*) from subjects, soldiers, and allies, the kind of loyalty and love that would extend over many generations. Kautilya also speaks of the importance of the subjects' loyalty, confidence and affection, but the *Nitisara* expands the vocabulary to add devotion (*bhakti*) and service (*sevā*).

Kamandaka's discussion of courtiers and court protocol is broadly similar to Kautilya's but has greater centrality within his larger discussion.[45] The *anujīvī*s (dependents or courtiers) are mentioned in the same breath as the *bandhu* (kinsmen) and *mitra* (friends).[46] For courtiers desiring political success, a crucial objective was to secure the king's affection (*anurāga*), and to regain it if it was lost for some reason or another. The courtier was advised to meticulously tailor his deportment and behavior to court protocol and propriety in accordance with his rank and position. Political success was considerably dependent on the ability to create in oneself and in others certain desirable emotional states and dispositions.[47]

Like the *Arthashastra,* the *Nitisara* indicates the intersection of the emotional, personal, and political. Disposition and sentiment are important parts of the political discourse. Attachment, estrangement, love, loyalty, confidence, and friendship are sentiments that are invoked to describe relations between king, courtiers, subjects, and other rulers. Kin, especially sons and wives, are sources of strength and support to the king but also a threat. The terms *mitra* or *suhṛt,* denoting friendship, are used both for personal friends and political allies of the king. These are distinguished from the *vallabha*s, or royal favorites, who seem to have been considered especially problematic characters as they are mentioned as one of several sources of fear to the subjects.[48]

Like his *Arthashastra* counterpart, the king of the *Nitisara* inhabits a dangerous world, and his foremost challenge (and indeed duty) is to protect himself. The detailed description of the king as a figure assailed at all times and from all sides by the threat of assassination, especially through poison, may have been realistic. Even if exaggerated, it suggests that violence against the person of the king was a serious source of anxiety for kings and political theorists alike. It was because of this ever-present danger that the king was advised to be well-protected, ever-vigilant, and to sleep lightly like a *yogin.*[49]

Like the *Arthashastra,* the *Nitisara* recognizes the political importance of the royal household in its detailed discussion of princes and the harem.[50] The harem (*antaḥpura, avarodhana*) was a place of pleasure and sensual indulgence, but it was also the most dangerous place for the king.[51] It was a space where there was much coming and going, and all movements required careful regulation. Members of the harem were to be watched over by officers known as *antaḥpurāmātyas*. Spies in various disguises were to keep a strict watch over everyone.[52]

> The king should move about in the harem escorted by eunuchs, armored and turbaned, hunch-backs, *kirātas* [hunters] and dwarfs.[53]

He should be protected by armed palace guards. Men of (over?) eighty years and women of fifty years and eunuchs should be appointed as attendants to members of the harem. Numerous examples are given of treacherous queens who had killed their husbands. Sons, too, were a source of serious worry, and had to be both protected and protected from. Kamandaka advises that even when going to meet his mother, the king should be escorted by trustworthy armed followers; he should not linger in narrow passages or deep alleys, lest he be attacked by assassins.

Potential troublemakers included those only partially integrated into the circle of kings—*sāmantas* (neighboring or bordering rulers) and *āṭavikas* (forest dwellers), who are frequently mentioned in the same breath. In the *Nitisara,* as in the *Arthashastra,* the term *sāmanta* does not yet fully have the distinct connotations of a subordinate

feudatory, which it later acquired. But the category of subordinate rulers is represented in the discussion of types of alliances. For instance, there is a discussion of the various kinds of treaties or agreements that could be concluded with a weaker or defeated power. Among these, the *puruṣāntara sandhi* carries the express obligation that the army chiefs (*yodhamukhyas*) of the ally would serve the *vijigīṣu*'s interests.[54]

Ancient Indian political theorists were aware of the possibility of political crisis and collapse. Kamandaka classifies disturbances that could threaten the kingdom into two categories: internal (*antaḥprakopa*) and external (*bāhyaprakopa*).[55] The former, described as potentially more harmful, includes disaffection among the royal *purohita, amātyas*, princes, members of the royal family, commanders, and chiefs of army contingents. *Bāhyaprakopa* includes disaffection among provincial governors, frontier guards, forest people, and those compelled to surrender.[56] But the king's most dangerous enemy is the king himself. The *Nitisara* speaks at great length about the problems that a kingdom faces due to the king's own character and dispositions. These include vices (*vyasanas*) emanating out of vanity (*mada*), anger (*krodha*), and attachment to sensual pleasures (*kāma*).[57] A kingdom whose king is afflicted by *vyasanas* is in deep trouble, even if the other *prakṛtis* are functioning well.

The opening verse of the *Nitisara* refers to the king as the wielder of *daṇḍa* (force, punishment). *Daṇḍa* is necessary for the maintenance of the dharma of the *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s. *Daṇḍa* must be exercised to ensure the protection and promotion of the prosperity of the subjects (*prajā*), and there was a reciprocal relationship between the prosperity of the subjects and the king.[58] As for Kautilya, so for Kamandaka, attaining political goals often involved using what would ordinarily be considered deceitful, violent means, but the political theorists were not squeamish about this.

Kamandaka offers various justifications for political violence, referred to in one place as "the policy of a lion" *(siṁhavṛtti*).[59] The most important of these is the attainment of desired ends, specifically the expansion and consolidation of political power. Force is also justified on the grounds of what would result from its absence.

> In this world, people move around in different directions, preying on each other. In the absence of *daṇḍa,* the law of the fish prevails and there is disaster.[60]

Violence is also part of the discussion of secret killing *(upāṁśu-daṇḍa*), where Kamandaka advises the king on how to kill adversaries, and the section on *māyā* describes various sly tactics to defeat them.[61] Enemies can be legitimately killed by secretly administering poison or by enlisting the services of estranged court physicians. Violence may also be necessary to deal with dishonest and impious people, those who obstruct the course of dharma, or royal favorites who create trouble, individually or collectively. If royal favorites cause loss of lives and become a source of anxiety to the people, they should be killed secretly.

> While performing his dharma, the king may have to dispassionately use violence [*hiṁsā*] while dealing with wicked, sinful people, just as the sages have to use violence [when they kill animals in sacrifice]. For this, he does not incur any sin.[62]

All this is very much in line with Kautilya's justification of force or

necessary violence on the grounds of political pragmatism and the need for political survival.

Justice is another important justification for violence. However, the king must be careful to blend the use of coercive power (*daṇḍa*) with proper procedure (*naya*) in order to be praised as a *yukta-daṇḍa.*[63] He is urged to use *daṇḍa* as firmly as the god Yama, but blended with the impartiality of the nature of the earth, and compassion similar to that shown by the creator Prajapati toward his own created beings. Coercion must be tempered with justice and a sense of proportion, for excessively harsh punishment terrifies the people, just as leniency makes the king worthy of contempt. So far, all this is in conformity with the attitude of many ancient Indian texts.

Kamandaka discusses punishment in very general terms. He speaks of three types of punishment—capital punishment, fines, and rigorous punishment involving bodily and mental pain. There are two types of execution or killing (the distinction between criminals and enemies is blurred): open execution (*prakāśa-daṇḍa*) and secret killing (*upāṁśu-daṇḍa*). An intelligent ruler desirous of religious merit should not inflict capital punishment on Brahmanas and righteous men or on *antyaja*s (outsiders or outcastes); the reason for excluding the latter is not made explicit. Interestingly, according to the *Nitisara,* capital punishment (*prāṇāntika-daṇḍa*) should be avoided even for the gravest offense, with the exception of the most serious one, namely usurpation.[64] Kamandaka's disapproval of capital punishment is in sharp contrast to Kautilya, who recommends the death penalty for several offenses.

Embedded in a political discourse peppered with disquisitions on force and violence is mention of the virtue of nonviolence.

> Nonviolence [*ahiṁsā*], refined speech, truthfulness, purity, pity and forgiveness constitute the dharma that is applicable to all [*sāmānya-dharma*], regardless of *varṇa* or sex."[65]

Further, the *vijigīṣu* is urged

> to punish the wicked and to support the good, to practice nonviolence toward all beings [*ahiṁsā sarvabhūtānām*], and to avoid all acts contrary to dharma.[66]

Nonviolence as part of the dharma common to all is also found in the *Arthashastra*. But as we have seen in his stand on the death penalty, and as we shall see in Kamandaka's attitude toward war and the royal hunt in the Chapters 4 and 5, this thinker's perspective on violence was rather different from Kautilya's.

The Centrality of Self-Control

While the goal of the *Nitisara*'s teaching is political success, there is an ever-present awareness of the possibilities of political malfunction through ineptitude, excess, imbalance, and tyranny. The ability of the king to achieve his political ambitions hinged on his ability to effectively control the various elements of the state. Like many of the other texts that have been discussed so far, the *Nitisara* recommends that the king cultivate the quality of discipline (*vinaya*) and control over his senses in himself, in princes, and among his subjects.[67]

Early in the *Nitisara,* Kamandaka defines and emphasizes the important relationship between philosophy and self-knowledge:

> Philosophy [*anvīkṣikī*] develops self-knowledge [*ātma-vidyā*], which leads to the understanding of happiness and sorrow. Realizing their true nature, he [the king] renounces both joy and sorrow."[68]

Numerous examples are given to prove the transience of life and its pleasures, and great emphasis is placed on the control of the sense organs. Striking in its Upanishadic ring is the following assertion:

> Just as the universal soul [*antarātmā*] residing in the midst of the elements of nature permeates the whole world, similarly does the king, in the midst of the elements [of the state], prevail over the whole world.[69]

While Kamandaka justifies violent means to attain political ends, a careful reading of the text suggests a more complex and nuanced perspective toward political violence, one that is rather radical in the context of the political thought of the time. The *Arthashastra* puts forward a brilliant vision of an arrogant all-powerful state, one that was omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. The *Nitisara* represents a post-Kautilyan reflection on political power, one that is cautious and restrained, especially with regard to issues related to political violence. Compared with Kautilya, Kamandaka was somewhat more concerned with the ethical dimension of politics.

Kalidasa and the Aestheticization of Kingship

If Kamandaka was the chief political theorist of mature monarchy, the poet and playwright Kalidasa was its most brilliant literary ideologue. His works include three plays (*Abhijnanashakuntala, Vikramorvashiya,* and *Malavikagnimitra*) and three long poems (*Raghuvamsha, Meghaduta,* and *Ritusamhara*).[70] Kalidasa was one of the foremost exponents of the western Indian Vaidarbha literary style, famed for its clarity and mellifluous flow. Unfortunately, we know little about this great writer. He seems to have lived in the fourth or fifth century and was probably connected with the city of Ujjayini in western India. It has been suggested that Kalidasa may have modeled his description of king Raghu's conquest of the quarters in the *Raghuvamsha* on the Gupta king Samudragupta and that the titles of some of his works contain allusions to other Gupta kings who may have been his patrons —Chandragupta II or Kumaragupta.[71] It has also been suggested that Kalidasa may have been a Gupta cultural ambassador to the Vakataka court. Notwithstanding the uncertainty about who his royal patron or patrons were, Kalidasa's works mark an important watershed in the representation of kingship in ancient Indian literature. Most of the various strands in this representation were present in earlier times. But Kalidasa created a new, brilliant distillation and synthesis of ideas in the form of exquisite Sanskrit prose and poetry.

Forgetting and remembering are an important part of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala* (The recognition of Shakuntala). This seven-act play tells the love story of king Dushyanta of the Puru lineage and Shakuntala, daughter of the nymph Menaka and the sage Kaushika, who is brought up in the hermitage of the sage Kashyapa.[72] A story about Dushyanta and Shakuntala occurs in the *Mahabharata* as well, but Kalidasa's rendering is different in several respects.[73] King Dushyanta spends most of the play either falling in love with Shakuntala or pining for her. He also appears as a hunter, protector of sages' hermitages, and an adjudicator in property-related suits. He is very frequently referred to as sage-like king (*rājarṣi*) and has a close relationship with the gods, especially Indra. The king forgets his beloved Shakuntala due to an angry sage's curse, but a ring restores his memory. The play directs attention to the conflict between love and duty.

The play also describes the conflict between the values of city and the forest hermitage. The young ascetics of Kashyapa's hermitage who escort the pregnant Shakuntala to Dushyanta's court find the city with its hordes of people disconcerting and unpleasant. They are unimpressed by the king's opulence and wealth, as well as by the *purohita*'s statement that the king is the protector of the *varṇas* and *āśramas*. Unfettered by the conventions and courtesies of courts, they speak their mind without deference or hesitation. They assert that the king must be judged by his behavior and his conduct toward Shakuntala, and they berate him for his refusal to recognize and acknowledge her as his wife (this is due to the curse). One of the hermit boys contrasts the innocent words of Shakuntala with the words of those who consider deception to be a branch of learning, a clear reference to the science of politics.[74]

The *Abhijnanashakuntala* has the idea of the *cakravartin* (paramount king). Dushyanta is a great king, but he is not a *cakravartin*. We are introduced early in the play to the fact that his son will be one. Later in the play, the child makes a dramatic entry, dragging a lion cub by its mane onto the stage, wanting to push open its mouth to count its teeth. This cub has half-sucked the milk from his mother's teats, but the child is oblivious to the danger of his situation. He has an innate, untamed strength; he is fearless and wild, beyond all imaginable

limits. He does not follow the gentle ways of the hermitage. The sages have aptly named him Sarvadamana—one who torments all. When the boy raises his hand to reach out for a toy, Dushyanta sees that the fingers of his hand are webbed. This is one of the well-known physical attributes of the great man in the Buddhist tradition! The sage Maricha sums up the *cakravartin* ideal in his prophecy about this unusual child:

> "After crossing the ocean in a chariot smooth and steady in movement,
> he, the unrivalled warrior [*apratiratha*], will conquer the earth consisting of seven continents.
> He is called Sarvadamana because he forcibly subdues all animals
> but he will acquire the name 'Bharata' on account of supporting the world."[75]

Is the idea of the *cakravartin* crossing the *ocean* on his chariot just poetic fantasy or is there an allusion here to Samudragupta's transoceanic exploits? *Apratiratha* occurs as an epithet on some coins of Samudragupta and also as one of his epithets in the Allahabad pillar inscription. The similarities are tantalizing, but not conclusive.

The Raghuvamsha

Among Kalidasa's works, it is the *mahākāvya* titled *Raghuvamsha* (Raghu's lineage) that has the greatest importance as political poetry. This long poem, consisting of nineteen *sargas* (cantos), provided one of the earliest holistic, authoritative, and aesthetically refined delineations of the mid-first-millennium classical Indian ideal of kingship.[76] The power and influence of this text surpassed Kalidasa's other works, and extended beyond the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia.

The theme of the *Raghuvamsha* is a royal lineage descended from Manu, the legendary progenitor of all earthly kings, but its special focus is on a sequence of kings of the Ikshvaku lineage from Dilipa to Agnivarna. Various scholars have suggested that the *digvijaya* (victory over the quarters) of king Raghu, an episode described in great detail in the *Raghuvamsha,* was based on the military campaigns and career of one of the kings of the Gupta dynasty—Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, or Kumaragupta.[77] As we shall see in Chapter 4, unlike Samudragupta's campaigns, Raghu's *digvijaya* is a clearly enunciated and detailed circumambulation of the subcontinent, and if Kalidasa modeled his description of Raghu's military campaigns on that inscription, it could have been only in a general rather than any specific way. The *Raghuvamsha* offers a more detailed, developed, and complex model of kingship and sovereignty than the inscription does. Further, it offers a literary exposition not only of ideal kingship, but also of the intersection of these ideals with the realities and problems of monarchical power politics. It is possible that while Kalidasa's ideas of kingship and empire were influenced by Gupta imperial expansion, it was Harishena, composer of the Allahabad *praśasti,* who was influenced by Kalidasa, rather than the other way round.[78]

The Ikshvaku kings Dilipa, Raghu, and Rama are central figures in the *Raghuvamsha,* and the Valmiki *Ramayana* was clearly a major direct source for Kalidasa's account of Rama's story.[79] And yet, there are many differences between the two narratives. Unlike the *Ramayana,* where references to Rama's divinity are concentrated in the beginning and end of the story, the hero's divinity is emphasized and reiterated throughout the *Raghuvamsha.* But the main difference is that the epic's focus is on Rama, while in the *Raghuvamsha,* although Rama plays an important role (he is the subject of five out of the

nineteen *sargas,* namely *Sargas* 11–15), Kalidasa tells the story not of a single king but of a lineage—the sun-born Ikshvaku clan. The origins of this clan are traced to the mythical Manu, but Kalidasa's focus is on eight kings—Dilipa, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, Rama, Kusha, Atithi, and Agnivarna—and his narrative ends with an unnamed pregnant widow of Agnivarna sitting on the throne of Kosala.[80] Kalidasa was the first Sanskrit *kavi* to produce a work that focused on a long lineage of kings. This emphasis on lineage can be correlated with royal inscriptions of the period, where, as we have seen, royal genealogy has an important place.

The political discourse of the *Raghuvamsha* is embedded in a larger cultural, philosophical, and religious matrix. We encounter the ideas of dharma, the *puruṣārthas*, *varṇa,* and *āśrama.* But it is *āśrama* rather than *varṇa* that is repeatedly emphasized and invoked in connection with kingship. Kalidasa valorizes the king's renunciation of the world in the twilight of his life.[81] The king's equanimity, detachment, and self-control are emphasized frequently and strongly. The gods appear in the *Raghuvamsha* as interceders, facilitators, and competitors, as well as objects of devotion (especially in the case of Vishnu). The religious landscape of the *mahākāvya* also includes a strong belief in the efficacy of the performance of sacrifices, pilgrimage, and vows (*vratas*).

The conceptual vocabulary of the political treatises surfaces frequently in different contexts in the *Raghuvamsha,* especially in Canto 17, which is devoted to the reign of Atithi, son of Kusha. Atithi is the only king whom we see engaged in the nitty-gritty of administration with any degree of specificity. Kalidasa describes him as an exemplary king who meticulously followed the dictates of *nīti* (proper governance) in order to create peace and prosperity throughout his kingdom. The etymological derivation of the word *rājan* (king) from the king's pleasing his subjects is given, and there are references to the seven elements of the state, the need for the king to maintain secrecy, and to be measured and fair in his punishment. Kalidasa mentions the four expedients of statecraft, the three powers of kings, the dangers of royal vices, the circle of kings, and the need for kings to follow the flexible policy of reeds. Clearly, the poet knew the *Arthashastra* vocabulary well. But he also had his own distinct political perspective, which surfaces especially in places where he was not bound by the story and characters of the *Ramayana.*

Several scholars have pointed to Kalidasa's skill in describing the

tension between *kāma* (sensual pleasure) and dharma, especially in the context of kingship; however, it should be noted that in ancient Indian poetic and political discourse, these elements were not necessarily seen as being in conflict with each other. Since the emotions were central to its art and reception, *kāvya*'s treatment of the affective landscape of power differs greatly from that of the political theorists. Positive emotions like love, friendship, pity, and kindness are emphasized; hatred, jealousy, and anger are negative emotions to which heroes rarely succumb. In the *Raghuvamsha,* the dangers of the interface between political fortune and human relations is revealed in the Rama episode, when intrigue and rivalry within the harem hurtles the royal family toward disaster. Nevertheless, as a general rule, and in stark contrast to the political treatises, which are replete with frequent dire warnings of the dangers posed by wives and sons, attachment to close kin is not presented as something to be avoided in *kāvya.* Unlike Kautilya's king, the king of the *Raghuvamsha* does not live a life of danger and violence, tormented by a perpetual fear of assassination, especially at the hands of his wives and sons. He does not fear, but rather embraces familial relationships. Another difference (and this is in line with the epics) is that in many *kāvya*s, great store is set on the king keeping his promise. The word has to be redeemed, even at the cost of a kingdom. Such an attitude is in contrast to the political pragmatism espoused by the political theorists. Political expediency and the single-minded pursuit of power are not the prime factors or focus in the story of the great Ikshvakus. The ethics and aesthetics of politics are framed within dharma, but are also subject to the emotional pulls of various kinds of relationships, principally, but not exclusively, those based on kinship. And as we shall see farther on, the delineation of this rich emotional landscape provides the background for a valorization of detachment and renunciation.

THE IDEAL KING

The *Raghuvamsha* combined the martial, ritual, and benevolent aspects of kingship. The centrality of the royal lineage is constantly emphasized, and there are four kings who stand out for a detailed description of their exemplary qualities and conduct—Dilipa, Raghu, Rama, and Atithi. It can be argued that Raghu, after whom the *kāvya* and the lineage are known, is the real hero of the long poem, as he closely and directly reflects the ideals laid out at the beginning of the *mahākāvya.* Of course, Rama, too, is important, but unlike Raghu, he

is a god-king, who can be only partially emulated by his human counterparts.

The *Raghuvamsha* reflects a complex understanding of the relationship between kingship and the gods. The tensions, even conflict between the heavenly and kingly realms are reflected most dramatically in Indra's determination to prevent the performance of Dilipa's hundredth horse sacrifice by carrying away the sacrificial horse, and prince Raghu's fierce battle with that god to regain it. Comparisons with the gods are frequent, most often with Indra, but also with other deities including Kama, Kubera, Karttikeya, Vishnu, Varuna, and the Ashvins. These are obviously to be understood as exalting the *station* of the king. Kings are also described as having elements of godliness in them. So, for instance, we are told that the guardians of the four quarters entered the embryo of Raghu and that Dilipa was a portion of the three-eyed god Shiva. But there is a difference between these kings and Rama, who is a full-fledged god (Vishnu) in human form and whose actions are determined and therefore justified by his godliness.

Kalidasa weaves into his poem an astounding range of titles, epithets, and attributes signifying various aspects of ideal kingship. The most important elements are laid out in five verses right at the beginning, where the traits of the members of Raghu's lineage are listed. These include purity, valor, perseverance, generosity, justice, watchfulness, and measured speech. The *Raghuvamsha* describes itself as the story

> of kings who were pure from their birth, who engaged in works till they attained success,
> who ruled the earth up to the ocean [and] whose chariots reached up to heaven.[82]

Kings of this lineage performed sacrifices in the prescribed manner; they acquired wealth in order to renounce it; they sought victory only for the sake of fame; they married only for the sake of progeny. It is not individual virtues, but a balance of many virtues and accomplishments that is emphasized. The political paramountcy of the great king is recognized by a congeries of lesser kings and is indicated by his imperial titles.[83]

The dharma of the king is an extension of *kṣatra-dharma* (the

dharma of the Kshatriya) in which protection of the subjects stands out.

> The great word *kṣatra* is well-known in the world through its etymology—"one who saves from destruction."[84]

The king gives refuge to his people. Raghu is described in one place as lord of the *varṇa*s and *āśrama*s, but this is not an aspect of kingship that is especially emphasized by Kalidasa till he comes to Rama. Rama is the only king of Raghu's lineage who is described as specifically punishing someone for transgressing *varṇa-dharma;* the Shudra who had dared perform austerities has to die. But elsewhere, more than any other king of Raghu's lineage, Rama is portrayed as a people's king. Other members of Raghu's line are also protectors and nurturers of their subjects, but as in the *Ramayana,* the subjects assume a larger than life role in the Rama story. They follow Rama around and share a mutual relationship of love with him; their opinion leads him to banish a beloved queen, and a query from one of them makes him launch a hunt for the cause of the transgression of dharma in his kingdom. Rama knows Sita is innocent and pregnant, and yet he banishes his beloved queen because he cannot bear the whiff of public scandal.

The ideal king is a brave warrior who is also skilled in the art of governance. He sees with the eyes of wisdom, and this wisdom is reflected in many specific aspects of his rule. Like the political treatises, the *Raghuvamsha* emphasizes that the ideal king's punishment must be measured and not excessively harsh. Dilipa punishes the guilty only for the sake of the maintenance of order; as a dispenser of justice to his people, he is *yukta-daṇḍa* (one whose punishments are fair and measured). Raghu does likewise:

> For by dispensing fair punishment he won the hearts of the whole world
> like the southern wind which is neither too cold nor too hot.[85]

Kingship has a paternalistic aspect, one linked with instruction and training. The *Raghuvamsha* repeatedly emphasizes that the king is a role model for his subjects with respect to proper behavior, especially

discipline (*vinaya*). Speaking of Dilipa, Kalidasa tells us that

> due to his imparting the foundation of self-control and discipline [*vinaya*] to his subjects, protecting and nurturing them,
> he was their father; their [natural] fathers were merely respon sible for their birth.[86]

The benevolence of the king is expressed ceremonially on certain special occasions. For instance, after his consecration, Atithi orders the freeing of prisoners and the commutation of the sentence of those awarded capital punishment. The king's benevolence extends to the animals of his realm—on this occasion, he orders that full-grown bulls are not to be yoked, cows are not be milked, and pet birds such as parrots and others that are confined in cages are to be freed.[87] Although this sort of activity is reminiscent of Ashoka, as we have seen, it is also mentioned in the *Arthashastra,* and it seems that these were customary ways of celebrating important political events.

The relationship between the king and the sages (*ṛṣis*) is presented by Kalidasa as one of reciprocity and mutual respect rather than hierarchy. Kings are frequently called on to protect the sacrifices in the *āśramas* of the sages; and it is emphasized that the sacrifices, *mantras*, blessings, and advice of the sages help maintain the well-being of the kingdom. Sacrifice (*yajña*) looms large in the *Raghuvamsha* as a preeminent aspect of kingship. The text makes analogies between the king and the god Indra and connects sacrifice with the prosperity of the realm:

> He [Dilipa] milked the earth [that is, levied taxes] for the sake of performing sacrifices and Indra milked heaven [that is, made rain] so that grain grew.
> Through this exchange of wealth, they sustained the two worlds."[88]

There are also references to specific sacrifices. All the material fruits of the conquest of the quarters are surrendered immediately afterward by Raghu in the performance of the *viśvajit* sacrifice. The most prominent sacrifice is the *aśvamedha*—three kings (Dilipa, Rama, and Atithi) are described as having performed it. Dilipa performs ninety-nine *aśvamedhas*; the hundredth one is interrupted by the god Indra,

who is jealous of the fame that the king would attain, should it be completed.

The ideal king is described not only in terms of his actions but also with reference to his inner qualities. The kings of Raghu's line are routinely described as self-controlled. The king collects wealth, but not out of greed, remains detached while enjoying pleasures, and is not attached to vices (*viṣayas*). Raghu does not crave victory, even while on his *digvijaya,* and in fact, gives away everything he has acquired in the *viśvajit* sacrifice, a relatively obscure rite that Kalidasa raises to the status of a great royal ritual because of his belief that great kings should be utterly indifferent to wealth. The political treatises such as the *Arthashastra* also emphasize the need for the king to be detached and to control his senses, and they, too, valorize the sage-like king (*rājarṣi*); but they do not advocate the complete abdication of power at any stage in his life. The *Raghuvamsha* takes the elements of detachment and equanimity to another level, advocating complete renunciation of power and the performance of austerities of various kinds toward the end of the king's life. Dilipa is foremost among kings and rules unrivaled over the entire earth as though it were a single town. But he is willing to give up this sovereignty for the sake of a cow he has vowed to protect. In Kalidasa's construct of kingship, the true greatness of a king does not lie in his achievement of paramount status; it lies in his readiness to spontaneously give up that status for the sake of pious duty.

The *Raghuvamsha* is the story of kings

> who in their childhood studied the various branches of knowledge,
> in youth sought pleasures,
> in their old age lived like hermits [*munis*], and in the end gave up
> their lives through *yoga.*[89]

Kings of Raghu's line do not cling to power till their death. Dilipa goes off to the forest and presumably dies there. Raghu enters life's last *āśrama* and becomes an ascetic (*yati*), practices *yoga* and meditation, and realizes the ultimate reality. Aja starves himself to death at the confluence of the Ganga and Sarayu. On the completion of his earthly mission, Rama plunges into the Sarayu along with all his subjects. Nala and Pushya go off to the forest and attain freedom from rebirth (the latter practices *yoga*). Kalidasa valorizes renunciation as

customary among Raghu's lineage and sees it as a desirable end to a king's life. He tells us that it was the family vow of the Ikshvaku kings to hand over power to their successors in their old age and retire to the forest.[90] This practice had the practical advantage of creating a smooth political transition, but it was essentially rooted in a philosophical matrix and also found a place in the classical Brahmanical *āśrama* scheme of life stages. The lives of the model kings of Raghu's lineage exemplify the fulfilment of the goals of human existence at different stages of life, and direct attention to the philosophical underpinnings of Kalidasa's political poetry.

The great king of the *Raghuvamsha* is a warrior and victor. There can be many kings at a given point of time, but the great kings are paramount kings. There are two references to the term *sāmanta* in the *Raghuvamsha*—which clearly refer to subordinate rulers, not just neighboring kings.[91] One of the important aspects of the *Raghuvamsha* as a political manifesto is its very specific and detailed mapping of the subcontinent as a political domain. This mapping takes place three times. The first occurs in Canto 4, in the description of Raghu's victory over the quarters (*digvijaya*), which gives a very detailed and specific mapping of the subcontinent as the field of the *cakravartin* (the details will be discussed in Chapter 4) in terms of the various lands, their rulers, people, and produce. The second occurs in Canto 6, which describes the princess Indumati's suitors during her *svayaṁvara* (marriage by choice). The third is found in Canto 13, which describes the lands that Rama and Sita traverse when they fly back from Lanka to Ayodhya on the aerial car called *puṣpaka*. The important thing to note is that Raghu's *digvijaya* and the notions of empire and sovereignty that it reflects do not involve conquest; they involve the demonstration of decisive military superiority by the victor and the acceptance of this by the defeated kings. The claim to political paramountcy is also publicly enacted and expressed in the performance of the *aśvamedha*. Kalidasa's poetic celebration of kingship goes a long way toward masking and aestheticizing its inherent violence.

THE FLAWED KING

In spite of his strong idealization of kingship, Kalidasa also offers insights into the some of the problems associated with monarchical power in mid-first-millennium north India. Behind the idealized perfection of the various kings of Raghu's line lurk imperfections,

excesses, errors of judgement, and addiction to vices.

As mentioned earlier, the political treatises list four vices (*vyasanas*) that can afflict a king: excessive addiction to wine, women, hunting, and gambling. Of these, the *Raghuvamsha* does not mention gambling and does not present drinking as a problem. The main focus is on excessive indulgence in women, followed by hunting. The negative fallout of a king's excessive attachment to a queen figures in Kalidasa's description of the reigns of Dilipa, Aja, Rama, and Agnivarna. The curse that almost leads to the extinction of the lineage is triggered because Dilipa is eager to unite with his queen, ostensibly for the production of a son. The potential calamity that this threatens to unleash is averted due to sage Vasishtha's timely intervention and the arduous vow Dilipa performs by serving the divine cow Surabhi's daughter Nandini for twenty-one days. Aja's attachment to his queen Indumati (she is actually an *apsaras* who has been cursed to an earthly existence by a bad-tempered sage) has more problematic results. When Indumati dies, Aja wants to ascend her funeral pyre and refrains from doing so only because of fear of his subjects' reproach. He is inconsolable and grieves for his dead wife for eight long years, while waiting for his son Dasharatha to attain maturity. When Aja falls ill, he sees it as a boon, and handing over the throne to his son, he starves himself to death at the confluence of the Ganga and Sarayu. Aja's excessive love for his wife is passed on to his son Dasharatha, who overlooks the rights of his eldest son, Rama, by succumbing to the ambitions of Kaikeyi. The vice of hunting is also prominent in the *Raghuvamsha.* Dasharatha dies of grief due to the curse that had been placed on him as a result of a wrong-doing committed by him while hunting, and Dhruvasamdhi (one of the later kings of the line) is killed by a lion while engaged in this pursuit.

The second-to-last ruler, Agnivarna, whose character and activities are described in great detail in Canto 19, is a debauchee:

> Unable to bear a single moment without the pleasures of the senses, day and night he immersed himself in his harem, ignoring his subjects who were eager to see him.[92]

Agnivarna enjoys music, dance, and wine, dallies with his women servants, lusts after dancing girls, and constantly searches for newer objects of satisfaction. The state of his bed, marked with the powder

of flowers, wilted garlands, snapped waist-bands, and vermillion dye reveals his incessant indulgence in the pleasures of love-making. Ironically, in spite of having many wives and being addicted to sensual pleasure, Agnivarna does not have any sons. He falls prey to a terrible sickness due to his over-indulgence but still continues to over-indulge.[93] The result is a political crisis. Agnivarna's ministers have to cover up for his dissolute ways and for his sickness. He ultimately dies of disease, and his ministers, in consultation with the chaplain (*purohita*), furtively throw him onto a funeral pyre in the palace garden. It makes perfect sense that Kalidasa's poem on kingship should describe both the heights of perfection that a king should aspire to as well as the depths of depravity to which he could sink.

In the course of a narrative covering the reigns of many kings, apart from the *vyasana*s that could afflict monarchs, Kalidasa also touches on several other problems of kingship. As in the epics, the central problem is that of succession, especially the anxiety about the production of heirs. In fact, the work begins with a desire for an heir and ends with the expectation of one. The *mahākāvya* emphasizes the principle of primogeniture, but the transgression of this principle suggests that it was not universally acknowledged or followed.

As mentioned earlier, Kalidasa recommends that the king should retire to the forest after handing over the reins of power to his son and successor. But there are problematic situations when the kingdom becomes especially vulnerable. This includes the accession of minor heirs such as Sudarshana, who is just six years old. Kalidasa evocatively tells us how subordinate kings bowed before the child king:

> To his feet which dangled a little from the throne, scarcely touching the golden foot stool
> And were dyed with red paste, the [subordinate] kings bowed their great crowns.[94]

Ministers play an important role in problematic situations, as they do at the end of Agnivarna's reign, when they cover up for his illness, reassure the subjects, and secretly cremate the dead king. Further, it should be noted that Kalidasa recognizes that when male heirs are unavailable, women rulers can take over. The *Raghuvamsha* closes with the pregnant widow of Agnivarna occupying the throne of the

kingdom of Kosala. The ensuring of smooth, uninterrupted succession is a major concern, but behind this concern lies an awareness of the conflicts and problems that arose at the time of political transition.

Like other poets and thinkers, Kalidasa underlines the inherent instability of power by making frequent remarks about the fickleness of Shri, the feminine divine personification of royal power. Violent challenges to the king's power take the form of jealous rival kings, best illustrated in the narrative of events following the *svayaṁvara* marriage of Indumati, when the rival suitors get together and waylay the marriage party as it moves toward Ayodhya, leading to a gory battle. Similarly, when Rama is exiled and Dasharatha dies, we are told that the kingdom of Kosala became the bait for foes who eagerly watched for its flaws. Many political problems are glossed over, perhaps in order to offer a normative model for relationships within the royal household. The relationship between kingship and kinship is a central issue. The relationships between kings, wives, and sons usually range from cordiality to intense love, but Kaikeyi's machinations reveal the dangers posed by harem intrigues to political stability and propriety.

The *Raghuvamsha* is an important text because of the comprehensiveness and elegance with which Kalidasa paints the portrait of the ideal king, weaving together attributes such as military victories, the performance of sacrifices, devotion to dharma, a complex relationship with the gods, veneration of the *ṛṣis*, benevolence toward the subjects, detachment, and self-control. The long poem seamlessly knits together city, palace, forest, and hermitage into an interacting and interdependent whole. These locales are imbued with enormous politico-cultural significance, in a manner that reflects an acknowledgement of their importance as well as an attempt to transform dangerous or problematic spaces into benign ones. It is the creation of such an all-encompassing imperial universe couched in brilliant Sanskrit poetry that gave the *Raghuvamsha* its great importance in India and Southeast Asia.

If the *Raghuvamsha* directs attention to the problems of kingship, it also points to solutions.[95] These include following the dictates of Kshatriya dharma; undertaking religious vows; devotion to the sages; the cultivation of virtues, especially self-control; the avoidance of vices; and most important, the voluntary renunciation of power after fulfilling one's duties. The military ambit of the exemplary king is a *digvijaya* of the subcontinent. However the notion of empire

(*sāmrājya*) that we encounter in the *Raghuvamsha* is one that involves victory but not necessarily conquest. Raghu's is a "victory over the quarters," not a "conquest of the quarters." While military victories are a necessary aspect of the rule of a great king, the greatest kings follow them up by renouncing the fruits of those victories. Renunciation toward the end of life is a central aspect of the model of ideal kingship in the *Raghuvamsha*. The violence inherent in kingship (and as we shall see in Chapter 4, even in war) is almost completely erased and aestheticized.

Vishakhadatta's Political Realism

At about the same time that Kalidasa wrote his magnum opus celebrating and aestheticizing kingship, Vishakhadatta wrote the *Mudrarakshasa* (Rakshasa's signet ring), a play that has a very different perspective on politics.[96] This seven-act play stands alone among all the dramas of ancient India in its unsentimental realism, reminding us of the political treatises rather than any other literary work. It is an action-packed, hard-headed drama, loaded with intrigue, espionage, and murder, a bit like the ancient Indian version of the *House of Cards* television series. Realpolitik, is in the forefront and the noble ideals of kingship take a back seat. There is no romance, no mirth—just unmitigated, relentless political strategy and counter-strategy.

Vishakhadatta was the grandson of the *sāmanta* Vateshvaradatta and the son of *mahārāja* Bhaskaradatta, members of a well-established family who probably ruled as subordinates of the imperial Guptas. This gave him an excellent ring-side view of the brutal realities of power politics. The first act of the *Mudrarakshasa* refers to the performance of the play before a political assembly called the *pariṣad.* Although the first two verses contain an invocation to Shiva in his aspect as the divine dancer, the last verse speaks of a king named Chandragupta and the god Vishnu. It lauds the lord of the earth (*pārthiva*) Chandragupta who had prosperous kinsmen and servants and who had protected the earth tormented by the barbarians (*mlecchas*). It also refers to the boar incarnation of Vishnu, to whose tusk the earth had clung in the midst of the deluge (this reminds us of the Udayagiri relief). These and the other references in the play suggest that it was written during the time of the Gupta king Chandragupta II (376–413 / 415 CE).[97] This makes Vishakhadatta roughly contemporaneous with Kalidasa, and a comparison of the political ideas in the *Mudrarakshasa* with those of the *Raghuvamsha* is in order.

The *Mudrarakshasa* is one of the few ancient Indian plays based on a historical event, even if it is a legendary memory of that event. It is set in Pataliputra (also known as Kusumapura) at a critical moment of political transition in the kingdom of Magadha, when the Nandas had been ousted and Maurya rule recently established. It is interesting that

a play set in the time of the Maurya king Chandragupta was probably written and performed some six centuries later in the time of a Gupta king with the same name. It has been suggested that the Gupta kings encouraged a deliberate revival of the Maurya past and consciously imitated Maurya forms and artefacts. The name Chandragupta assumed by two Gupta kings, the writing of a play set in Maurya times, and a Gupta-period lion capital at Udayagiri, which is similar to earlier Maurya prototypes, buttress this interesting hypothesis. The creation of a new legend about the author of the *Arthashastra,* connecting him with the minister of Chandragupta Maurya, has also been seen as part of a recrafting of the Maurya legacy in the Gupta period.[98]

Like some of Bhasa's plays discussed above, the *Mudrarakshasa* is not about kings but their ministers. The two protagonists are Chanakya (who is also referred to as Kautilya and Vishnugupta) and Rakshasa; they are the larger-than-life ministers of Chandragupta Maurya and the deceased Nanda king Sarvarthasiddhi, respectively.[99] The allies of the Nandas include Parvateshvara, who from his name, seems to have been a mountain or forest king. There are also *mleccha* kings, allies, and confederates of Rakshasa, who hover around in the background. The entire play is devoted to a description of the attempts of Chanakya and Rakshasa to outwit each other. Vishakhadatta introduces a new element in the age-old debate between fate and human effort. Brilliantly executed strategy can be made to appear like fate.

The plot and the dramatis personae demand a heavy dose of political theory in the play, and we are not disappointed. Vishakhadatta makes several interesting analogies—between the management of the household and the state, between a snake charmer and a statesman, and between a politician and a playwright. There are numerous direct references to the principles of *nīti, daṇḍanīti,* and *arthaśāstra* and to the conceptual vocabulary of statecraft, indicating that Vishakhadatta knew the subject well. There is both the idea of multiple power centers and the idea of imperium over the whole earth.[100] Rakshasa's spies manage to enter the palace through a secret chamber (*suraṅga*) in the walls of the king's bedroom, reminding us of Kautilya's description of secret chambers and passages in the royal residence. The play and the political treatise mention the use of a mechanical contrivance (*yantra*) that can be used to kill an enemy. The idea of passports for moving in and out of the city are present in

both works. The terms for officials also correspond well, although the *Arthashastra* naturally contains a much more elaborate listing.

Of the four political expedients, the *Mudrarakshasa* focuses on one —namely, creating dissension. There are references to the standard vocabulary of interstate relations including the *vijigīṣu,* the six *guṇas*, and the *ari, mitra,* and *udāsīna,* who are part of the circle of kings. In fact, the entire play can be seen as a dramatic enactment of one of the important principles of ancient Indian statecraft—namely, the use of strategy rather than force in order to attain political goals. Although Chanakya alludes to the misgovernance of the Nandas, there is no question whatsoever that this is a pure conflict for power. Dharma is unimportant, and there is little reference to the benevolent role of the king. It is a world far removed from the days of the noble king Shibi, who is mentioned three times in the play.[101]

As in the *Arthashastra,* so in the *Mudrarakshasa,* political violence is treated in a matter-of-fact manner. The play is full of various kinds of spies and assassins, including a femme fatale called a poison maid (*viśa-kanyā*). A doctor trying to kill Chandragupta by mixing poison in his medicine is found out by Chanakya and is forced to drink the poison himself. There is reference to secret killing (*upāṁśu-vadha*). Like Kautilya, Vishakhadatta recognizes internal threat (*antaḥkopa*) and external threat (*bāhyakopa*) to the state. In his advocacy of a ruthless, single-minded pursuit of political goals, Vishakhadatta is no less pragmatic than Kautilya.

Chanakya and Rakshasa are well-matched in their intellectual acumen and understanding of realpolitik. Because they are so evenly matched, their strategies sometimes backfire. So, for instance, a "poison maid" employed by Rakshasa to kill Chandragupta ends up killing Rakshasa's ally Parvateshvara instead. They are both prone to emotional outbursts, Rakshasa to ones of despair and grief, and Chanakya to ones of anger. Before Chanakya strides onto stage, stroking his loose locks, the stage director introduces him thus:

> "This is Kautilya of crooked intellect,
> in the fire of whose fury the Nanda lineage was violently burned."[102]

Chanakya is a completely clinical and cold-blooded political animal, but Rakshasa has a more human aspect. While trying to outwit each

other, they also understand, admire, and respect each other. Both men are true to their vows. Both fight for their side, but their aims are different. While Rakshasa wants to destroy Chanakya, the latter wants to win him over to his own side. Force is not the chosen tactic—there are armies in the background, but they scarcely come face to face. Both Chanakya and Rakshasa use other tactics—espionage, feigning, subterfuge—to try to outwit each other. Spreading rumors is an important part of the play. Several of the characters are spies, and some of them are double agents, so the distinction between what seems to be happening and what is really happening becomes blurred at times. It is like a bewildering game of chess played by two grand-masters, where the moves are made with breathtaking speed. So swift and relentless is the game of deception that it often leaves the reader, as it must have done the audience, bewildered and confused.

The relationship between Chanakya and Chandragupta, minister and king, shows an interesting reversal of what one would expect in a classical Sanskrit play. In one place, the minister Chanakya is described as the founder of the Maurya dynasty. The king is inconsequential and treats the minister with exaggerated deference. The minister, for his part, treats the king with scarcely concealed contempt, usually referring to him and calling him "Vriṣala" (hunter).[103] This seems to be on account of his low birth, which contrasts with Chanakya's own exalted Brahmana status. Chandragupta is a paramount king, described predictably as one whose lotus feet are made red by the light from the facets of rubies in the crowns of kings bowing before him. But his behavior toward Chanakya is one of extreme obsequiousness—saluting him with deference and falling at his feet.

The center-piece of act 3 is a feigned quarrel between the king and the minister, designed to be overheard in order to create a false impression in the enemy ranks. Vishakhadatta manages to pack a great deal of realism and punch into this scene, getting his characters to say things that would have been unthinkable in normal circumstances. Observing the difference between a de facto and de jure king, a bard comments:

"The enjoyment of ornaments and such things do not make a king a lord,
He whose command none can disobey is, like you, declared to be a

lord."[104]

We also see Chandragupta angrily expressing his resentment to Chanakya at being a powerless king:

"When the sphere of my endeavors is at all times obstructed by your honor, my kingdom is not a kingdom but a prison."[105]

Chanakya curtly tells Chandragupta that if he does not like the power equations between them, he should take over the responsibilities of the state. Many rude things are said by both. At the end of act 3, Chandragupta is shown ashamed at what he had been forced to utter in the course of the quarrel. Vishakhadatta's audience would no doubt have been scandalized while watching this scene unfold, even if this was supposed to be a feigned, and not a genuine, quarrel.

Worries about reversals of fortune and political instability resurface repeatedly. Chanakya claims to have uprooted the nine Nanda kings from the earth, making royal sovereignty (Lakshmi or Shri) stable in the Maurya line like a lotus plant in a lake. But although the Nanda king has been killed, his supporters, Rakshasa being the chief among them, are alive, and the conflict is therefore not ended. The characters frequently complain about the fickleness of Lakshmi, often using erotic imagery. Chandragupta talks about the difficulty of wooing the goddess of royal sovereignty, who is like a notorious prostitute. Rakshasa gives an especially strong indictment of royal sovereignty, describing Lakshmi as a wanton, sinful woman who has abandoned the Nanda king for the Maurya.[106]

Vishakhadatta's sharp critique of monarchical power politics emerges in his delineation of some of the principal characters. Chanakya suggests at several points that the last Nanda king was arrogant and his regime marked by maladministration. We are also told that this king had prematurely adopted the hermit's life as a result of a long siege and out of pity for the citizens of the city, suggesting that he was not willing to fight back. This did not help because he was killed anyway. Chandragupta is no role model himself. He is a lazy puppet, interested in fun and festivities, who has effectively handed over the reins of power to Chanakya. As Chanakya muses cynically,

"Although naturally endowed with power, when forced to maintain themselves through hard work,
the lords of elephants and the lords of men usually suffer unhappily."[107]

Chanakya speaks of three kinds of kingdoms: those dependent on the king, on the minister (*saciva*), and on both. He tells Chandragupta that his is one that is dependent on the minister. This three-fold classification of kingdoms seems to be Vishakhadatta's own contribution to political theory.

The *Mudrarakshasa* talks not so much about the vices of the king, but about those of the ministers and other high officials. Factions and jealousy are rampant among the upper echelons of the political elite. Prince Malayaketu rues that fact that in the presence of kings, ministers say one thing for fear of offending them, and in frank discussions say the opposite. But Vishakhadatta clearly had strong sympathies for the plight of the courtier, and his play contains a caustic critique of courtly life. The spy pretending to be a snake charmer likens being a king's servant to playing with snakes. As the chamberlain observes in melancholy vein, service (*sevā*) is painful:

"One must live in dread of the king, then of the counselor, and then of the king's favorites,
And then of others, those licentious rogues who, having obtained his favor, live in his palace.
The demeaning servitude of a man who toils for morsels by raising his face and uttering flattering words
Has been rightly held by the wise to be the life of a dog."[108]

It is only greed and indigence that lead people to praise a king for virtues he does not possess.

"For those free from desire, a king is, like a piece of straw, an object of contempt."[109]

The dependent Bhagurayana bemoans having to follow orders and dupe the innocent, and rues a dependent's "turning his back on lineage, shame, fame and pride."[110] Even the once powerful Rakshasa

is aware of the precarious position of the dependent. He lives in fear of the lord and of those who move near him. The status of those who rise to high position leads to jealousy in the minds of vile men. As Bhagurayana remarks,

> "The course of those who rise to eminence is equally prone toward descent."[111]

The dangers of the king's anger and his punishment always lurk in the background. In the case of people implicated in treason, the play refers to banishment, impaling on the stake, seizing of property, imprisonment along with members of the family, and death by torture (*vicitra-vadha*). In act 7, the hangman Vajraloma warns of the king's violence:

> "If you want to protect your life, wealth, family and wife,
> beware of the danger of going against the king.
> And further,
> When a man consumes unwholesome food, the result is illness or death,
> but in the case of hostility to the king, the whole family is killed."[112]

At the end of the play, Chandragupta succeeds in incorporating Rakshasa into his camp. Foes have become allies; the ruthlessness of what has happened before is forgotten. The audience can go home happy. Although there is great similarity in the political perspectives of the *Arthashastra* and *Mudrarakshasa,* there is also a difference. For Vishakhadatta, politics seems to be *entirely* an art of the intellect. Toward the end of the play, Chandragupta marvels at how Chanakya has overcome the powerful enemy without an arrow having been fired. While recognizing the importance of intellect and strategy, Kautilya also recognizes and elaborates on the use of force and war in politics.

Pragmatic Politics in Animal Tales: The *Panchatantra*

The serious matters of kingship and political violence could also be discussed through humorous animal stories. The *Panchatantra* (The five books, or The five topics) is a Sanskrit treatise that came to have unparalleled circulation in various parts of Asia and Europe. The first translation (into Pahlavi) was made in circa 550, and the Sanskrit original may have been composed in the third century.[113] Vishnusharman, the putative author, is described as having composed this work consisting of five books after having studied all the works on governance. The prelude (*kathāmukha*) is followed by stories and stories within stories, arranged in five books on the following topics: creating dissension among allies (*mitra-bheda*); securing allies (*mitra-prāpti*); peace and war (*sandhi-vigraha*); losing what one has gained (*labdha-nāśa*); and hasty actions (*aparīkṣita-kāritva*). The wit and humor and fact that the characters are animals blunt the rawness of the stories, but political conflict, violence, killing, and avoiding being killed are important parts of the *Panchatantra* tales.

The main frame story introduces us to a great king named Amarashakti, learned in all the treatises on governance, who ruled over the city of Mahilaropya. The king was in despair because he had three very foolish sons. At the suggestion of his ministers, he entrusted the young princes to the tutelage of a wise old Brahmana named Vishnusharman, who makes the astonishing vow that he will teach them the art of politics within six months. Vishnusharman goes about doing this through stories, and the *Panchatantra* contains these stories. The main frame suggests that the author or authors were Brahmanas who were experienced not only in statecraft but also in the art of story-telling—an interesting combination. Their ostensible purpose was educating young members of the political elite in the art of politics painlessly and in an entertaining manner. But the brilliance of the stories and the universality of their message made them travel across time and region in different languages and forms, making the *Panchantantra* one of the most influential Indian texts of all time.

Written in a combination of prose and verse, the *Panchatantra* describes itself as a treatise on statecraft (*nītiśāstra*). It connects itself with the intellectual tradition on statecraft (referred to variously as *nītiśāstra, nṛpaśāstra,* and *arthaśāstra*) right in the beginning, by paying

homage to the stalwarts—Manu, Vachaspati, Shukra, Parashara and his son, and Chanakya—who had composed great works on kingship. The text is aware of the ideas and conceptual vocabulary of Dharmashastra and *arthaśāstra.* But because it consists of dramatic, witty, and entertaining stories, its flavor is completely different from their dry and dour tone. The *Panchatantra* is indeed, as it describes itself, a treatise on governance of great charm. It is not only the sons of Amarashakti who listen spellbound. We, too, follow the twists and turns of the stories, similarly captivated.

Although the *Panchatantra* is very familiar with works on dharma and *artha,* and cites them, the moral of many of its tales does not match the teachings of those works; in some cases, it actually goes against them. The text extends the reference of *nīti* beyond the king and court to society at large; it can be read as referring to both the political and the personal spheres. So, for instance, the discussion of the all-important *mitra* can be understood as referring to political allies as well as personal friends. This meant that the potential audience and impact of the text extended far beyond the political elite.

Texts such as the *Panchatantra* no doubt drew on a pool of stories that had been in oral circulation for a very long time, but the act of writing the stories down and molding them to a specific didactic frame involved a creative intervention and remodeling on the part of the author or authors. Although the Jatakas and *Panchatantra* have much in common—most strikingly in their wide cast of animal characters—they are also quite different. Unlike the Jatakas, most of the *Panchatantra* stories are short and crisp, with unexpected and unpredictable plots, and many of them are incredibly funny. Even when there are stories within stories, the reader's attention does not wander. Further, as we have seen, while the Jatakas have a political element, their dominant agenda is that of emphasizing Buddhist ethics. There is no such religious or ethical stamp on the *Panchatantra.* The text is critical of ascetics and monks. Although a few Hindu gods make an occasional appearance, they are not really important, and the *Panchatantra* is, by and large, nonsectarian. There is a didactic frame, but it is a very pragmatic one. The emphasis is on the need for effort, intelligence, cunning, and—above all—solid good sense to survive in a difficult world. There is also an emphasis on enjoying the good things of life, including material comforts and friendship. It was the combination of enormously entertaining stories with very down-to-

earth, practical advice on issues of universal concern that contributed to the great popularity of the *Panchatantra* stories.

The forest is the setting of many of the stories, but other locales include the village, city, palace, lake, and seashore. There are some humans—kings, merchants, Brahmanas, carpenters, hunters, washermen, and farmers. But the main and most memorable characters are animals. (The range of animals and subspecies is less than in the Jatakas). Some of these (the dog, ass, goat, horse, bull, and camel) are domesticated, but as in the Jatakas, most of the important characters are wild. They include lions, jackals, deer, elephants, leopards, monkeys, hares, tortoises, crocodiles, and fish. There are birds such as doves, herons, geese, crows, and owls. There are mice, mongooses, and snakes, as well as bugs like lice. Among them all, it is the lion and the jackal who stand out.

As in the Jataka stories, the animals of the *Panchatantra* have human-like emotions and intelligence, and they have a society and polity akin to that of humans. The animal world is divided into distinct species. Each species has its own king, but the lion is king of the entire animal kingdom. Animal species are associated with certain innate, "natural" characteristics (as are people of different rank and station in human society), based on human observations of animal traits and behavior.[114] But there is also an interesting anti-stereotyping; for instance, there are stories in which the lion is not brave but a coward. There is also some flexibility in animal characterization; a jackal, for example, can be foolish or clever, depending on the demands of the narrative. The most important features of the characters are announced in the names that they are given. Interspecies rivalries and conflicts are central to the stories, and the various animal species can be correlated with different "types" of people belonging to different social backgrounds and stations and possessing distinctive character traits.

We get a good idea of the main teachings of the *Panchatantra* by looking at the themes of its five books. The theme of Book 1 (the longest one) is creating dissension among allies or friends. It deals with how to get ahead in court, use cunning in order to eliminate rivals, dupe the king into dependence, and live a life of comfort. Book 2 demonstrates the importance and benefits of friendship. Book 3—the second-longest one—shows how clever strategy can be used to defeat a more powerful enemy and emphasizes the importance of governance based on sound policy. Books 4 and 5 are very short. The former

shows how the wise can see through the crafty plots of adversaries and outwit them; and the latter teaches that quick thinking must not be confused with acting impulsively in haste. Because they deal with different issues, the morals of the various books are not necessarily in consonance with one another, and some of them actually contradict each other.

Kings and Courtiers

The stories and verses in the *Panchatantra* talk about the king as protector, provider, and dispenser of justice. Ruling is a burdensome responsibility that has to be discharged through the use of sound policy. The *Panchatantra* speaks of the three powers of the king, the importance of good counsel, the four expedients, the six strategies of interstate relations, and the role of ambassadors. The king must be ever vigilant and suspicious, and must beware of the danger of excessive force. Subordinates must be subjected to tests of loyalty. There are quotations from the *Manusmriti,* many echoes of the *Arthashastra,* and references to the characters and events of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata.*[115] In the political treatises, creating dissension (*bheda*), is generally discussed as a strategy to be used against enemies. In the *Panchatantra,* it is used by courtiers to upstage and eliminate their rivals.

The importance of self-control is touched on, as are the vices and afflictions of kingship. The seven vices of kingship are enumerated as follows:

> Women gambling, hunting, drinking,
> Harsh speech is the fifth;
> Excessive severity of punishment
> And the undue seizure of wealth.[116]

Royal sovereignty is unstable; misfortune has been the lot of many famous kings. Like all others, great kings are ultimately crushed by the jaws of death. Chiramjivi, the wise minister of the crow king Meghavarna, tells him not to be deceived by the arrogance of royal fortune, for the power of the king is inherently unstable.

> "It is said: Royal fortune is like a reed—one falls down the moment one climbs onto her. She is like mercury—even after making much effort, it is not possible to grasp her. No matter how hard one tries to make her happy, she betrays you in the end. She is fickle like a monkey king; difficult to grasp like a drop of water on a lotus leaf; wavering like the wind; unstable like the association with uncultured men; difficult to appease

like poisonous snakes. She glows momentarily like a streak of clouds in the twilight. Like bubbles on water, she is transitory by nature. Like the nature of the body, she is ungrateful for what is done for her. She disappears the minute she is glimpsed, like a heap of money seen in a dream."[117]

In contrast to the majestic animal kings in the Jatakas, the portrayal of animal kings in the *Panchatantra* is anything but flattering. The frame story of Book 1 is dominated by a golden-maned lion king named Pingalaka and two jackal courtiers, the daring Damanaka and the cautious Karataka. In the lion king's portrayal, we get both the ideal and the reality of kingship. The lion king lives all alone in the forest. He is ignorant of the science of governance, he is not consecrated, nor does he carry the insignia of royalty. It is on account of his physical might that all animals bow down before him and proclaim him king, it is through his prowess that he wins his fortune, and he himself has crowned himself lord of all the animals.[118] The lion king is soon revealed to be an utter coward, who is stricken with terror at the distant sound of an ox. The real hero—or rather, antihero—of Book 1 is a jackal named Damanaka, a courtier who has fallen out of favor and is trying to rise in the court circle. Treated with great respect and deference by the foolish lion king, the crafty Damanaka manipulates him for his own gain. He is the hero and the model character to be emulated—clever, audacious, and a quick thinker.

In contrast to the wily Damanaka, the courtier Karataka follows all the rules of courtly deportment, and toward the end of the book, gives a long pious speech about the good royal adviser. But although he is allowed to say his piece, and gives a stinging critique of the wickedness of Damanaka, he is a loser. Damanaka, for his part, having schemed his way into the confidence and affections of the lion king, lives happily ever after, basking in the comforts of the royal court. So there is no doubt about the preferred model of the courtier in the *Panchatantra*.

Like the lion king of Book 1, the elephant king of Book 3 is cowardly and gullible; he is fooled by a clever hare named Vijaya (Victory), who is an expert in politics (generally, it is the smaller animals who are the political experts!). The frog king in the same book is foolish, and so are his ministers. The monkey king in Book 4 is

old, weak, and driven into exile due to a younger competitor; he is also sentimental and foolish, but comes to his senses when faced with imminent death at the hands of a crocodile, with whom he has formed a bond of friendship. The lion king of Book 4 is so old, sick, and weak that he cannot even kill an ass brought to him by his cunning jackal minister. Book 2 is the only place where we see a king in a more positive light, no doubt because of its overall positive theme of friendship. Chitrangada, king of the doves, has great compassion and concern for his subjects. He uses quick thinking to rescue them from the net of a hunter, and puts their liberty over his own when he tells the mouse to gnaw through their bonds before his. There is also an interesting passing allusion to king Shibi, who gave his flesh to a falcon to protect a dove.[119] As mentioned above, the *Panchatantra* lists the vices of kings, using *Arthashastra* terminology—gambling, womanizing, drinking, hunting, speaking harshly, meting out excessively severe punishment, and seizing property without justification. But the text is not really concerned about these issues; the biggest problem of kings is their stupidity.

In the *Panchatantra,* the denunciation of kings is much stronger than their praise. The king is a spendthrift, unpredictable and prone to extremes of behavior. Like that of a prostitute (*veśyā*), his behavior takes many forms.[120] The dominant perspective is that of the courtier. The bottom line is: Kings are violent and dangerous.

> The minds of kings are like
> a house where a snake lies hidden inside,
> a groove that is filled with ferocious beasts,
> a shady pool with charming lotuses
> but teaming with crocodiles;
> The minds of kings are warped
> always by wicked vile men who tell lies;
> The minds of kings, timorous servants find,
> Are difficult to fathom in this world.[121]

Some of the most striking verses in the *Panchatantra* have to do with the position of the king's servant or courtier. We have hints of the vulnerable position of the courtier and the tyranny of court protocol in the political treatises and the *Mudrarakshasa,* but these are expressed much more bluntly here. The precariousness of the

dependent's life is described with great bitterness:

> You may be loyal, you may be helpful,
> Devoted to kindly and wholesome deeds;
> You may know every aspect of service,
> Totally free of treacherous intents;
> Yet, make one slip, and you're as good as dead,
> While your success is uncertain at best.
> Serving any lord of the earth, therefore,
> Is much like serving the lord of waters [the sea];
> It is always fraught with risks."[122]

Moreover, the *Panchatantra* moves beyond the courtier's concerns in the political treatises (how to work his way upward in the court circle and get close to the king) to another level—how to control the king. Damanaka is the daring courtier who uses his powers to persuade and deceive the king in order to control him. We also encounter the dependent who aspires to *be* king.[123] It is said several times that there can be no friendship between meat-eaters and grass-eaters.[124] This is a graphic metaphor for the conflict between the king and courtier—the eater and the eaten. Beneath the veneer of humor of the *Panchatantra* stories is a great deal of political tension, conflict, and violence.

Although the *Panchatantra*'s advice is made in the context of ancient court intrigues, its ruminations on the relationship between powerful bosses and employees could just as easily be transposed onto a modern corporate context. The talking animals get away with saying things that could perhaps not be articulated as bluntly by human protagonists in a highly hierarchical society. (In the *Panchatantra,* animals generally talk to each other, not to humans.) This is one of the things that gives the *Panchatantra* its power: It reveals the underbelly of courtly society and society at large, shorn of pious platitudes. Dharma is mentioned in passing, but is of little importance. Courtiers plot against their rivals and their king and deliberately give him bad advice. The cat Dadhikarna, devoted to austerities, learned in the Dharmashastra, and seemingly full of compassion, is actually a fraud.[125] Brahmanas are picked on for their foolishness, wandering ascetics for their hypocracy; monks (probably Buddhist) are killed off in the end. We are in the realm of political satire, social critique, and bawdy humor, all of which give the stories a lot of punch. Elements of

satire can be seen in other early texts (for instance, in the character of the *vidūśaka* in Sanskrit drama), but the *Panchatantra* marks the true birth of political and social satire in Indian literature. In this respect, while upholding certain ideas of realpolitik, the *Panchatantra* is also a socially and politically subversive text.

The themes that run through most of the *Panchatantra* are turned on their head in Book 2 (The acquisition of friends). Unlike the other books, where conflict, rivalry, and enmity are rife, this one is about securing friends, the great benefits of having quick-thinking and loyal ones, and how friends should join together to help each other in times of adversity. While the stories elsewhere in the *Panchatantra* emphasize natural enmity, in this book, the crow Laghupatanaka and the mouse Hiranyaka—the eater and the eaten—actually become good friends. The mouse at one point talks bitterly and cynically about the power of wealth and the ups and down of life, but he also talks about the values of righteousness and compassion, and ultimately, he adheres to the latter. We also see a rather weird situation in which the crow tries to force his friendship on the mouse. The mouse, after brushing him off initially, citing the natural enmity between their species, finally succumbs, and the warmth of their relationship is reflected in their long and intimate conversations. And ultimately, the book ends with the four friends (deer, mouse, crow, and turtle) living happily ever after. The last verse muses that if animals can form such close friendships, surely men can too.

Book 4 is also about friendship, but shows both its ups and its downs. The title (On losing what has been gained) can at one level be interpreted in a material sense: In it, we see how the crocodile lost the monkey whose heart he wanted to feed to his wife. But in a sense, it is also about the forging and the loss of a wonderful friendship. The love between the monkey king and the crocodile is intense and inspires many verses on friendship:

> MITRA—
> These two syllables of the word for “friend,”
> Who is it that has created this gem?
> A shelter against sorrow, grief, and fear,
> a vessel of love and trust.”[126]

The discussion of the friendship between male animals is framed within a discourse that feeds into misogynist and also perhaps homosexual male fantasies.[127] The intense friendship between the monkey and the crocodile is destroyed due to the latter’s jealous wife.

The crocodile has to choose between his friend and his wife, and ultimately chooses the latter. But there is also a subtext that while friendship is wonderful, one cannot trust a friend. This goes against the celebration of friendship in second book of the *Panchatantra*.

Killing is central to most of the *Panchatantra* stories. For instance, there is the story of the washerman who covers his emaciated ass in a leopard skin and sets him out to graze in a field. The farmer, thinking he is a leopard, is terrified and hides under a grey blanket. The ass mistakes him for a she-ass and runs after the farmer, who runs away from him. The ass decides to captivate the supposed she-ass by braying in order to reveal his true identity. The farmer realizes that he is an ass and not a leopard; he turns around and shoots the ass dead with an arrow.[128]

There is an element of irreverence in several stories. For instance, there is a conversation between a louse who lives on the king's bed and sucks his blood and a bug who gets blown to that spot one day. The bug observes to the louse that he has sucked the blood of members of all four *varṇa*s and it tastes disgusting; he says that he wants to taste the king's blood because it must taste delicious. He winds up dead.[129] Especially in Book 1, the most political of all the books, the good guys rarely win, and the bad guys (with a few exceptions) usually do.[130] We are told quite frankly that conventional virtues can lead to ruin. Truthfulness, kindness, and helpfulness to others lead to disaster. The idea of self-sacrifice (even feigned) is mocked. Cunning, quick thinking, and hard-headedness are valorized. The only social relationship that is celebrated is friendship, and even that does not emerge unscathed.

A lot of the *Panchatantra* stories are about sheer survival, including political survival. There is one passing reference to nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) being the highest dharma,[131] and the dangers of the king using unnecessary or excessive force are underlined. Of the four expedients, conciliation (*sāma*) is described as the best, and force (*daṇḍa*) the worst, the most sinful, and not always the most useful or effective.[132] But most of the stories are quite violent; they are about animals trying to kill and eat other animals or animals trying to escape being killed by other animals. The general advice is: Use your wits to save yourself from death; kill rather than be killed. As mentioned above, it is stated several times that there can be no friendship between meat-eaters and grass-eaters, the eaters and the eaten. This appears to be a metaphor for the natural enmity between the strong and the weak, the predator and his prey. It is invoked in the

context of the relationship between king and courtier and between rivals in the court circle. With one notable exception (the crow and the mouse), the eater ends up eating the eaten.

Apart from stories of animals being killed, there are also stories about animals being trapped. The young deer Chitranga falls into a hunter's trap and is brought to the palace where he becomes the prince's pet, but he longs for his freedom.[133] What is this a metaphor for? Could it be a veiled reference to the ideal of political and social freedom?

The political philosophy of the *Panchatantra* has been described (again, anachronistically) as Machiavellian—ruthless, immoral, amoral. While the text begins on a very political note, it ends on a very commonsensical note with the following advice: Don't be rash. It is perhaps better to see the *Panchatantra*'s teaching as a pragmatic philosophy that caters both to the political and the personal and everyday, especially in the context of the dealings between the weak and the strong. Elements that are emphasized are clear and quick thinking, using strategy to protect one's interests, the importance of hard work, and completing tasks that have been begun. The lessons that remain long after reading the stories include: Listen to good advice; don't talk nonsense; have confidence in yourself; never lose heart; when cornered, think fast; don't build castles in the air; money isn't everything; cherish your friends. This is just the kind of practical advice that an experienced, worldly-wise uncle might give to his impulsive and inexperienced teenaged nephew or niece. Different sorts of lessons can be pulled out of the *Panchatantra* to suit different situations. The combination of rapid action, wit, and sound common sense make the text as relevant today as it was to kings and commoners in the middle of the first millennium.

Apart from the various texts mentioned above, political ideas were expressed in free-floating or collections of verses known as *subhāṣita* (well-spoken words), which were considered as embodying wisdom. One of the most famous collections is attributed to Bhartrihari, a writer who is very difficult to date and who may have lived in the mid-first millennium. His three poetic anthologies, consisting of one hundred verses each, are the *Nitishataka, Shringarashataka,* and *Vairagyashataka.* (As the verses in these texts display some variation in quality, all of them may not have been composed by the same person.) In the *Nitishataka,* the word *nīti* does not have the specific political content that it has in the political treatises such as the *Nitisara.* Rather,

it is part of a larger discourse on wise and good living. The subjects of the other two collections are love and renunciation. Bhartihari's poetry is marked by a brooding reflectiveness and brutal realism. There are many animal analogies, suggesting an overlap with the tradition of animal fables. The *Nitishataka* includes verses on good and bad character, fate, virtues, learning, fame, luck, dharma, self-control, friendship, and merit. Buried in the midst of general reflections are advice to kings and cynical observations on kingship. These include reference to the problems of being in the king's service and the danger of his anger. The fickleness of the king is commented on:

> Now truthful, now false; now harsh, now speaking sweetly; now cruel, now merciful; now stingy, now generous; ever spending wealth and accumulating it—thus does the policy [*nīti*] of kings, like a prostitute, assume many different forms.[134]

Another important text, composed in the sixth century, reflects some of the beliefs and practices current in royal courts. Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita* deals with an amazing array of subjects including astronomical phenomena and conjunctions, portents, crops, gems, architecture, temple-building, characteristics of men and animals, aphrodisiacs, and perfumes. It emphasizes the need for a king to have a good Brahmana preceptor and astrologer (*daivajña, daivavit*), pointing out that one with knowledge of the portents can become famous and the king's favorite. In its discussion of astrological conjunctions and portents, there is an obsession with identifying those that signal the king's death and the destruction of the kingdom, and how these can be countered by performing sacrifices, worshipping the gods, giving gifts, and black magic.[135] The monthly royal ablution (*puṣyasnāna*) is a complex ritual involving, among other things, the priest making a mystic diagram of the whole world over which the king seeks mastery. This ritual is said to put an end to the evil effects of portents and to confer peace, prosperity, and victory. Reminding us of the views of Ashoka and other ideal kings, Varahamihira's description of the rite includes the release of animals from the hands of butchers and the release of all prisoners, except those who are a threat to the kingdom.[136]

The Dharma and *Artha* View of Politics

The various texts and sources discussed in this chapter show a solid core of political ideas that had taken shape by the middle of the first millennium. The great king is projected as protector of his people and of dharma; a great victor; a paramount ruler whose paramountcy was accepted by many lesser kings; benevolent toward others; and possessing sterling qualities of character, especially self-control. Analogies with the gods, a close association with the sages, and the performance of great Vedic sacrifices, especially the *aśvamedha,* appear frequently. References to the performance of these are found earlier, but increase during the period of the mature monarchies. Inscriptions introduce us to an increasingly important aspect of royal practice: the king granting land to Brahmanas and religious institutions. The epic tradition continues to be invoked in political discourse. Elements of political anxiety can be seen in the *Mahabharata* and Puranic account of the evils of the Kali age, which, among other things, include violence and the rule of *mleccha* kings.[137]

How did a certain level of consensus on the ideology and practice of kingship emerge and how did it spread across the subcontinent during these and succeeding centuries? Part of the answer to this question lies in the centrality of the king–Brahmana relationship in ancient Indian political theory and practice. Brahmana ideologues fanned out to royal courts and assumed important roles as political advisers, ritual experts, and composers of royal epigraphs. And yet, the Brahmanas were a heterogeneous group, lacking any institutional organization. In such a situation, it was the wide circulation of *śāstric* knowledge, literary works, and epic traditions that offered powerful templates for the discussion of political issues and the construction of royal ideology. Although royal courts were not the only locus of this activity, they were certainly the most important one. The villages granted to learned Brahmanas were also important nodes in the spread and increasing influence of Brahmanical culture—a process that can be termed Brahmanization.

Royal inscriptions and coins, which contain a compressed distillation of many of the ideas found in a range of texts, played important roles in the communication of political ideas across regions and periods. Kings and their Sanskrit-knowing Brahmana panegyrists

were aware of the content of the inscriptions of their predecessors and contemporaries. Royal eulogies, prominently displayed on pillars or in temples, were visible to a literate audience. Copper-plate grants, on the other hand, were in the possession of the beneficiaries of royal grants. Pillar and copper-plate inscriptions may have had performative aspects, which would have helped disseminate their ideas. The importance of land grant inscriptions stretched far beyond their function as records of property transfers; in fact, they became preeminent vehicles for announcements of political and social status. Coins were a powerful medium of expression of political ideas too. The Gupta gold coins, for instance, can be seen as the numismatic counterpart of the *Raghuvamsha,* presenting an abbreviated version of certain elements that had become central to the ideology of kingship by the middle of the first millennium.

Kings were not considered divine in ancient India.[138] The nature of the relationship between kingship and the religious domain was complex. The association of kings with particular deities was announced through textual innuendo, epigraphic analogy, and monumental sculpture. It was also announced in their sectarian epithets and the building and patronage of temples dedicated to certain gods. But all these developments took place in a milieu of inclusive sectarianism where a particular deity or saint may have been favored or even projected as supreme, but shared space with others. Parallel to the epithets that announce kings as worshippers of a specific god, certain kings of Orissa describe themselves as supreme worshippers of the gods in general (*parama-daivata*).

The inclusive religious policy adopted by kings, including recently arrived invaders, contributed toward mitigating religious conflict and violence, with a few exceptions. An inscription found at Kura in the Salt Range records the building of a Buddhist monastery by a person named Rotta Siddhavriddhi during the reign of the Huna ruler Toramana. The donor expresses the wish that the religious merit gained by his gift be shared by him with the king and his family members.[139] It has been suggested that the famous Buddhist monastery at Kaushambi was destroyed by Toramana.[140] Toramana's successor Mihirakula (reigned circa 515–550) acquired a reputation as a persecutor of the Buddhists. Xuanzang describes Mihirakula as cruel and oppressive toward Buddhists, and the later Tibetan traveler Taranatha echoes this view. The Chinese pilgrim Songyun, who visited Gandhara in the early sixth century, attributed the destruction of the

Gandhara monasteries to the White Huns or the Ephtalites.

The Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila has given evidence of severed heads, dismembered bodies, and skulls bearing the marks of blows. The charred wood and half burnt wheat in one of the monastic courts suggests fire, and a burned birch-bark manuscript bears testimony to a violent episode. John Marshall interpreted all this as evidence of a massacre by the White Huns and a more general Huna onslaught against the monasteries in the Taxila area in the late fifth century.[141] Of course, we should note that the skeletal remains belong to only six individuals. But even if the scale of killing and destruction may be less than what one would expect in a massacre, the archaeological evidence does clearly point to some kind of violent event. Further, the fact that many arrowheads of different kinds were found within the precincts of the Dharmarajika monastery[142] suggests a perception of a need for defense against violent attack.

Xuanzang tells us that initially Mihirakula was interested in learning about Buddhism, and asked the monks to send him a teacher; the monks insulted him by recommending a servant of his own household for the purpose. This incident is said to have turned Mihirakula virulently anti-Buddhist. Xuanzang states that he destroyed 1,600 monasteries in Gandhara and had 9,000 men killed or sold into slavery on the banks of the Indus.[143] He attributes Mihirakula's subsequent death to these terrible acts. Was this reputation based on actual religious persecution? Or was Mihirakula cast into the role of a cruel anti-Buddhist king because one of his arch political opponents, king Baladitya of Magadha (sometimes identified with a later Gupta king Narasimhagupta), at whose hands he apparently suffered a crushing defeat, was an ardent patron of the Buddhist sangha?[144] The interesting thing is that ninth- and tenth-century Jaina texts describe Mihirakula as a wicked, oppressive tyrant who was anti-Jaina.[145] It is possible that Mihirakula, who from one of his inscriptions and the symbols on his coins seems to have been inclined toward Shaivism (although his coins also have representations of other deities such as the goddess Lakshmi), was inimical toward both Buddhists and Jainas.

Another king who acquired a reputation for religious persecution against the Buddhists was Shashanka, a ruler in eastern India in the early seventh century (just after the close of the period that we are surveying in this book). According to Xuanzang, this king destroyed monasteries, cut down the bodhi tree, and tried (unsuccessfully) to replace the image of the Buddha at Bodh Gaya with one of Shiva.

Shashanka was a contemporary of Harshavardhana, king of Kanauj, who was inclined toward both Shaivism and Buddhism.

The questions raised by the two cases cited here are: Are the textual references evidence of active political persecution and violence? Or are they merely expressions of resentment at a lack of royal patronage and support? Are they recastings of political conflicts into religious molds? The material evidence is also confusing. On the one hand, images of deities trampling on their rivals in early medieval times have been found at various sites. On the other hand, Hindu deities found at Buddhist sites such as Nalanda suggest their incorporation into Buddhist worship. Even if the extent of the persecution of kings such as Mihirakula and Shashanka was exaggerated, it is significant that such *perceptions* of violent royal persecution and oppression on religious lines existed. But Mihirakula and Shashanka are exceptions to the general trends of royal religious policy. It should be noted that expressions of sharp religious and sectarian competition and conflict increased in subsequent centuries.

The similarities and overlaps in the models of kingship and empire expressed in texts, inscriptions, coins, and art should not make us oblivious to the differences. Harishena's Samudragupta is a poet-king; Kalidasa's Raghu is a king-renouncer. Echoes of the ideas emphasized in the *Raghuvamsha*'s representation of kingship can be seen in many texts and inscriptions of succeeding centuries, but the idea of the king as renouncer does not seem to have been important in the long term. Further, we know from a variety of sources that in early medieval India, revenue-free grants of land to Brahmanas and the patronage of temples—which were not part of the *Raghuvamsha*'s template of kingship—became important aspects of the ideology and practice of kingship. The variations in royal ideology are more noticeable in the *praśasti*s of smaller dynasties. For instance, the origin myths and eulogies of the early kingdoms of Orissa indicate a synthesis of Brahmanical and tribal elements.[146] So in the long term, there is both homogeneity and diversity, both continuity as well as change in the ideology of kingship.

By the middle of the first millennium, there were sophisticated and authoritative expressions of two views of politics, which can be called the dharma view and *artha* view. Royal inscriptions, coins, and Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala* and *Raghuvamsha* represent the former. The *Mudrarakshasa* and *Panchatantra* represent the latter. There are shared ideas—for instance, the king's just punishment of his subjects

as necessary to maintain the social order is found in both. Both views engaged with the problem of defining and legitimizing political violence in somewhat different ways. The king's force was necessary for political survival and political gain (this is *artha* view); or it was necessary for the fulfillment of duty, for glory and fame (this is the dharma view). In between are texts such as the *Nitisara,* which combine the *artha* view of politics with greater elements of caution and sensitivity toward violence. The *Panchatantra* expands the discourse on political violence by drawing attention to the potential conflict and violence inherent in the relationship between kings and courtiers. But in general, the use of a certain amount of force by the king toward his subjects and toward others and was accepted as necessary and justified.

In the process, from the state's perspective, political "violence"—in the sense of the unnecessary, unjustified use of force—was rendered virtually impossible. This emerges more clearly in the political discourses on war and the forest, which form the subject of Chapters 4 and 5. Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina models of kingship have their distinctive elements, but we have seen how the discourse on kingship, especially when it came to the issue of violence, breached religious and sectarian divides. Even the *ahiṁsā*-oriented religious traditions recognized the impossibility of absolute nonviolence in the political realm. The poets not only accepted political violence, but also transformed it and celebrated it. By the middle of the first millennium, political violence had been justified, masked, and largely invisibilized by political theorists, religious elites, and the poets. But a window of doubt, critique, and questioning remained.

CHAPTER FOUR

War

TIME FEELS STILL and heavy at Bhimbetka. The hundreds of rock shelters on the hillsides at this central Indian site are adorned with paintings, engravings, and bruisings ranging from the Mesolithic to the early historic periods. The earliest paintings are dominated by animals, and the artists seem to have poured all their artistry into their portrayal. Men—usually hunters—are puny stylized matchstick figures. They hunt alone or in groups, often wearing ornaments, head-dresses, and ceremonial masks. A dramatic change in style and theme takes place in the paintings of the Chalcolithic age. Hunting parties are replaced by the lone hunter, and hunting scenes eventually make way for representations of farming and herding. Men ride on animals, and the war chariot makes its appearance. The paintings of the historic period show an even more dramatic thematic change. The contest is no longer between man and animal but between man and man. Soldiers armed with swords and shields battle one another on foot or on caparisoned horses and elephants. The rock art of Bhimbetka gives vivid visual documentation of a process that historians have tried to explain in less enchanting ways—the close connection between the emergence of the state and war.

A peaceful state never existed in South Asia. There is a theory that the protohistoric Harappan civilization was a peaceful culture held together by tradition rather than force, but weapons and walled citadels suggest a different story.[1] Fortification walls continue to be associated with cities in the subsequent centuries, both in texts and in the archaeological record, and suggest a defensive preparedness against military attack. Vedic texts are pervaded with violence and war and allude to the ideas of extensive conquest, political

paramountcy, and empire. Indra, the powerful manly warrior god, kills his adversaries and bestows victory in war to mortals who sacrifice to him. The great warriors of the Vedic hymns rode into battle on horse-drawn chariots accompanied by soldiers on horseback or on foot, wielding bows and arrows and other weapons. In the Vedic world, the killing of animals in sacrifice was an issue of some concern, but the killing of men in battle was not. The people who described themselves as *āryas* fought wars against those they called *dāsas* and *dasyus*, but they also battled among themselves.

The fortification walls and profusion of weapons found at early historic cities such as Kaushambi, Rajgir, Rajghat, Champa, and Ujjayini reflect the endemic warfare in northern and central India from the mid-first millennium BCE onward. In most cases, the fortifications are constructed of mud and / or burned brick; at Rajgir they are made of stone; and at Ujjayini, mud and wood. The early walls of Kaushambi, made of mud with a burned brick revetment, reached an average height of 10.66 meters, the towers rising to about double that height. This imposing wall, punctuated by eleven gateways, was surrounded by a moat and protected by watchtowers. Fortified cities made their appearance in other parts of the subcontinent some centuries later. But evidence of warrior burials with iron weaponry from megalithic sites in peninsular India bear testimony to the pervasiveness of war long before the advent of urban life.

In early historic north India, relations between states were marked by alliances (including matrimonial alliances) as well as incessant warfare. The transition from a hereditary military aristocracy toward a recruited and salaried army was accompanied by changes in military administration and organization. Bimbisara, king of Magadha, had the title *Senīya* (one who has an army), suggesting that he was renowned for his military strength or that he introduced the practice of recruiting a standing army. The oligarchies seem to have relied on the older tradition of the armed hereditary elite going into battle whenever the occasion demanded. The Achaemenids claimed control over the northwest between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. Alexander of Macedon scarcely grazed the fringes of the subcontinent in 327–326 BCE, but during the subsequent centuries, the Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Pahlavas, and Kushanas ventured farther into the interior. Inroads into the forest were an important part of the onward march of aggressive and ambitious states.

The first millennium BCE saw many changes in the nature and technology of warfare.[2] At around the time of the emergence of monarchical states, the horse-drawn war chariot was replaced by the war elephant. Armies dominated by the chariot gradually made way for a fourfold army (*caturaṅga-bala*) consisting of infantry, chariots, cavalry, and elephant corps. Thomas R. Trautmann places the transition to the fourfold army in circa 1000–500 BCE.[3] The Sanskrit epics refer to a *caturaṅga-bala* but retain a nostalgic memory of an old-style of war dominated by heroes riding onto the battlefield in splendid horse-drawn chariots. Warfare had changed.

Although the armies of early India were dominated by war elephants, they included mounted archers. Over the centuries, these armies faced, and often succumbed to, cavalry-based attacks of the Macedonians, Shaka-Pahlavas, Kushanas, and later, the Hunas. Saddles appear in second / first century BCE relief sculptures at Bharhut and Sanchi, and this may have been a result of the influence of the central Asian invaders. The art of Sanchi and Mathura also gives evidence of the looped stirrup; metal stirrups came into use much later, after the nineth century. Coins, sculptural reliefs, and the Ajanta murals indicate that while archers on horseback were part of Indian armies in the first half of the first millennium, they did not form their backbone.[4] In fact, the Hunas, famed for their cavalry skills, swiftly absorbed and incorporated war elephants into their own armies once they established themselves in India. Later, elephant-based Indian armies were repeatedly defeated by cavalry-based armies of the Turks and then the Mughals, with momentous political results.[5] The demand and supply of elephants and horses played a crucial role in the outcome of Indian wars. The fact that India imported horses and exported elephants is of fundamental importance in understanding her political and military history.[6]

Whether or not the early kingdoms and empires of India had a navy is a matter of debate. The *Arthashastra* does not mention a navy, but Megasthenes does. Perhaps the Greeks were projecting onto India something that they were very familiar with in their part of the world. Although we encounter allusions to naval expeditions in a few inscriptions, most of them belong to the post–600 CE period. Hero stones in the Goa area on the western coast depict sea battles, and some of the Ajanta murals show fleets of ships, but the overall evidence of naval warfare is not very strong. Given the enormously long subcontinental coastline, the essentially landlocked nature of the

military aspirations and the expansion of ancient Indian kingdoms and empires is a curious fact that is not easy to explain.

Vedic warriors were armed with bows and arrows, spears and axes, initially of copper and bronze, and later of iron.[7] The bow and arrow was the most important weapon in epic warfare, and we also hear of elaborate ornamented bows, along with swords, spears, and maces. The *Arthashastra* mentions bows made of various material such as bamboo, wood, and horn. In the wake of the Bactrian, Shaka, and Kushana invasions, new types of bows such as the horn-bow and composite bow, new kinds of arrowheads (double-tanged and three-bladed), and a heavy javelin came into vogue. The invaders also brought with them new sword designs, which can be seen in sculpture; the Kushanas in particular are associated with a heavy, broad, long sword. Armor and shields are known from early texts. The *Arthashastra* and *Mahabharata* refer to military contrivances, and the former divides them into fixed and moving machines (*yantra*s). Kautilya also refers to the use of fire in war.

Over time, there were changes in military tactics and battle arrays. The latter, known as *vyūha*s, were the subject of a long-standing tradition of specialized military knowledge, of which Brihaspati and Ushanas are spoken of as the foremost authorities.[8] It is not only human armies; even the gods and demons are said to have battled each other in *vyūha* formations. On the basis of the nature of the relationship between the wings, flanks and center, the four main types were the staff (*daṇḍa*), snake (*bhoga*), circle (*maṇḍala*), and noncompact (*asaṁhata*), but there were many other types and subtypes such as the wheel (*cakra*), cart (*śakaṭa*), hawk (*śyena*), needle (*suci*), and sea monster (*makara*). Each array had its corresponding counterarray (*prativyūha*). The *Mahabharata* refers to more than thirty-six battle arrays, and each day of the war began with the selection of an array and counterarray by the leading generals. The arrays are also mentioned in the Puranas and, to a lesser extent, in the Jatakas and *Manusmriti.* The detailed treatment of the subject in the *Arthashastra* and *Nitisara* indicates that the *vyūha*s were considered important aspects of war and politics, and that the political theorists made significant contributions to the development of this sphere of technical military knowledge.

The focus of this chapter is not on military technology or strategy; it is on understanding the attitudes toward war in Indian thought between circa 600 BCE—600 CE. This is done by examining Buddhist

and Jaina texts, Greek accounts, Ashoka's inscriptions, the epics, political treatises, memorial stones, Sangam poetry, royal inscriptions, *kāvya,* and the *Panchatantra.* The chapter explores the place of war in statecraft and religious traditions; the idea of the ideal warrior; the code of honor in war; the understanding of the self and the other in the sphere of military conflict; the typology, justifications, and ethics of war; and the desire for peace. Warfare conventionally includes armed conflict, but we shall also encounter and reflect on its metaphorical forms.

Nonviolence, Victory, and Renunciation

It is not a coincidence that religious ideologies emphasizing nonviolence arose at a time when violent warfare was escalating and military organization was becoming more systematized in northern India. And it is ironic that the most celebrated and successful proponents of nonviolence emerged from the ranks of the warrior elite and expressed their ideas using the warrior vocabulary of mastery, conquest, and paramountcy. This vocabulary simultaneously permeated discourses on renunciation, salvation, and kingship.

War is an important metaphor in both Buddhism and Jainism. Mahavira is the "great hero," one of several *jina*s (victors). Addressing him while he was still an embryo in the Brahmana woman Devananda's womb, the god Indra hails the *arhat*s (those who have attained liberation) and lions among men, universal emperors of the best law, the conquerors and granters of conquest.[9] When the Buddha is questioned about the one thing whose killing he approves of, his answer is: the killing of anger.

> Having slain anger, one sleeps soundly;
> Having slain anger, one does not sorrow;
> The killing of anger, O devatā [god],
> With its poisoned root and honeyed tip;
> This is the killing the noble ones praise,
> For having slain that, one does not sorrow.[10]

As we have seen, renunciation and asceticism have an older history in India. But Mahavira and the Buddha connected them with the political domain through their personal histories and through their postulate of kingship and renunciation as two dichotomous poles. Given the dominance and influence of the political sphere, this had an important impact. At one stroke, the ideas of renunciation and self-control that had been circulating within a small milieu of philosophers and thinkers were catapulted into the position of central political, indeed civilizational, issues. The emphasis on nonviolence in Jainism and Buddhism should, on the face of it, have translated into a strong antiwar stance. But did it really, either at the level of thought or of practice?

Buddhism and Jainism recognize that while nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) is important, it is not possible for the laity to practice it with the same rigor as the monastic community. But the emphasis on nonviolence is much more intense in Jainism. As discussed in Chapter 1, all killing is not the same in Jainism. Harming organisms with different numbers of senses has different value. Intentional, premeditated violence (*saṁkalpa-hiṁsā*) is distinguished from the less serious violence (*ārambhajā-hiṁsā*) that occurs in the course of performing an acceptable occupation, for instance, that of a surgeon or farmer. Even less serious are acts of violence that were committed purely in self-defence (*virodhī-hiṁsā*).[11]

The Jaina laity is supposed to avoid harming beings with two or more senses, but monks and nuns are supposed to avoid harming even small insects and the even tinier single-sense organisms that are believed to inhabit the earth, water, fire, and air. They must not dig the earth, lest they kill earth bodies. They should avoid bathing, swimming, or walking in the rain, lest they kill water bodies. They should not kindle or extinguish flames, lest they harm fire bodies. They should not fan themselves, lest they harm air bodies. They should avoid walking on grass or touching plants, lest they harm plant bodies. It is mandatory for Digambara monks to carry a small broom in order to sweep the place where they sit so that they do not harm small creatures.

Mahavira gives a discourse on the various troubles that are likely to beset the wandering mendicant, troubles that he must learn to bear and conquer like a hero in war. These include insects:

> Suffering from insects a great sage remains undisturbed. As an elephant at the head of the battle kills the enemy, so does a hero (in self-control conquer the internal foe).
>
> He should not scare away (insects), nor keep them off, nor be in the least provoked to passion by them. Tolerate living beings, do not kill them, though they eat your flesh and blood.[12]

The repeated, strong emphasis on nonviolence extends beyond negative injunctions to positive ones.

> With due consideration preaching the law of the mendicants, one should do no injury to one's self, nor to anybody else, nor to any of the four kinds of living beings. But a great sage, neither injuring nor injured, becomes a shelter for all sorts of afflicted creatures, even as an island, which is never covered with water.[13]

Modes of speech must be measured and moderate; negative, exploitative words should not be uttered about fat men or animals, big trees, ripe fruits, or vegetables. These should be replaced by positive utterances.[14]

Given the centrality of nonviolence in Jainism, it is not surprising that jobs that necessarily involve violence, such as hunting and fishing, are to be shunned. The six approved occupations are governing, writing, farming, imparting knowledge, trade, and crafts. Out of these, administration and farming are considered less respectable as they involve some amount of violence, and in trade, there are prohibitions on dealing in certain kinds of commodities.[15] The soldier's job is neither specifically approved nor proscribed, though it could be included in governing. The Jaina monk is supposed to avoid places where there is a conflict between kingdoms.[16]

There are variations in attitudes toward war. The *Bhagavati Sutra,* composed in the early centuries CE, speaks of two terrible battles that occurred during Mahavira's lifetime.[17] Mahavira rejects the idea that soldiers who die fighting bravely go to heaven and predicts that almost all of the dead soldiers will be reborn in lower realms of existence. And yet, there is no strong proscription of war. The Jaina attitude seems to be as follows: Sometimes it becomes necessary to fight; if one has to fight, one must do so with the right inner disposition and values. The best illustration of this comes from a later work, the *Adipurana.* In this eighth-century text, Bahubali fights his half-brother Bharata for his kingdom in order to prevent a war. But although he gets the better of Bharata, he does not kill him and goes toward the forest in a quest for liberation. In his work titled the *Samayasara,* the Digambara Jaina monk Kundakunda alludes to what is clearly the *Bhagavadgita* philosophy, stating that one who thinks he kills or is killed is ignorant, emphasizing that death and killing are the outcome of actions in previous lives.[18]

A verse of the tenth-century Jaina writer Somadevasuri has

sometimes been interpreted as implying that while killing in a defensive war should be avoided, it is acceptable for the laity. However, the story literature suggests that even killing in self-defense leads to hell. In the Jaina *Ramayana,* Lakshmana, who kills Ravana, goes to the same hell as the latter does.[19] The Jaina attitude toward war varies from ambivalence to tacit acceptance and justification. The strong emphasis on nonviolence in Jaina doctrine did not translate into a shunning of war by followers of the faith. Jaina monks had no qualms in prophesying victory or defeat for kings as they embarked on military campaigns. And as we shall see below, Jaina kings were not pacifists.

Ashoka, the Buddhist king, renounced war (though he was the only one to do so). Kharavela, the Jaina king, did not. The Hathigumpha inscription boasts of Kharavela's military victories in general as well as very specific ways. Kharavela is a great king (*mahārāja*), the overlord of Kalinga, the augmenter of the glory of the Chedi lineage, endowed with auspicious marks, possessing virtues that have reached the four quarters. He is described as destined to have extensive conquests like king Vena.[20]

There is a distinct pattern in the description of Kharavela's reign: It oscillates between his martial achievements and benevolence, seeking to create a balance between the two. After describing the king's building and repair activities and his gratifying his people in the first year of his reign, the inscription tells us that in his second year, disregarding Satakarni (a Satavahana king), he sent to the western regions an army strong in cavalry, elephants, infantry, and chariots. That army reached the Krishna river and threw the Musikas into consternation. The next line, which refers to the king's skill in music and his entertaining the capital with song, dance, and festivities, is followed by mention of his having deprived the Rathikas and Bhojas of their jewels and royal insignia, and having made them bow at his feet. Descriptions of further benevolent activities are immediately followed by reference to Kharavela sacking Goradhagiri with a large army in his eighth year. We are told that he went on to besiege Rajagriha and that the Yavana king Dimita was forced to retreat to Mathura, his army and transport having been diminished.

The palace built by Kharavela was called the Palace of Great Victory. In his tenth year, the king followed the policy of force, alliance, and conciliation; sent an expedition against Bharadavasa (that is, Bharatavarsha, here probably referring to kings of northern India); was victorious over the land; and obtained many riches from defeated kings. He went on to plough the town of Pithumda, founded by the Ava king, with a plough of asses, and he broke up the age-old confederacy of the Tramiras, which had been a source of danger to his kingdom. He terrified the kings of Uttarapatha, and caused panic among the people of Magadha, driving his elephants into the palace of king Bahasatimita, making him bow at his feet. He retrieved the image of the Kalinga Jina that had been taken away by the Nanda king and

brought back the riches of Anga and Magadha to Kalinga. The aestheticized reference to plunder and tribute continues with the Hathigumpha inscription telling us of the large quantities of pearls that Kharavela brought in from the Pandya king. The hyperbole of the inscription suggests sustained and far-flung military victories across the subcontinent; the claims no doubt vastly exceeding Kharavela's actual political control.[21]

Although he was a relentless warrior, Kharavela's inscription also refers to another kind of victory in describing the gifts he made to the Jaina monks when the wheel of victory (*vijaya-caka*) had revolved for thirteen years on the Kumari hill. The epigraph closes by describing Kharavela as the king of peace (*khema-rāja*), king of prosperity (*vaḍha-rāja*), king of monks (*bhikhu-rāja*), and king of dharma (*dhama-rāja*), who had been seeing, hearing, and realizing auspicious things. He was a descendant in the family of the royal sage (*rājasi*) Vasu, endowed with irresistible chariots and army, and a great victor (*mahā-vijayo*). He had extraordinary virtues, respected all sects (*pāsaṁḍas*), and repaired temples (*devāyatanas*). Martial and benevolent achievements strikingly balance one another in this catalogue of Kharavela's achievements, and while he is said to respect all sects, his associations with Jainism are highlighted.

In later centuries, we know of many Jaina rulers, ministers, and generals who planned and participated in wars. Kings of the Ganga, Rashtrakuta, and Hoysala dynasties who had Jaina leanings fought as hard to protect and expand their dominion as those with other religious affiliations.[22] The famous tenth-century general Chamundaraya of the Ganga dynasty was as renowned for his ferocity on the battlefield as for having patronized the building of a colossal statue of the Jaina saint Bahubali at Shravanabelgola in modern Karnataka.

In Buddhism, too, all acts of killing are not the same. They can be graded according to the size and virtue of the victim, the intensity of the desire to kill, and the amount of effort used by the perpetrator.[23] So, for instance, killing an insect is not as serious an offense as killing an animal or a human being. Killing a criminal is not as serious an offense as killing a virtuous man. And killing that involves a relatively less amount of brutality in terms of intention and force is less serious than killing that involves greater amounts of both.

The most sensational war of the sixth / fifth century BCE was the protracted conflict between the kingdom of Magadha and the Lichchhavi oligarchic confederacy. Buddhist texts tell us that the Magadhan king Ajatashatru deputed his minister Vassakara to visit the Buddha for advice on how to defeat the Lichchhavis. The Buddha did not advocate pacifism. The clever Vassakara caught on to the implications of his reply—namely, that the Lichchhavis were too strong to be defeated in regular combat and that other tactics would have to be used. This is exactly what the Magadhans did. Vassakara went undercover to create dissension among the Lichchhavi ranks, and the strategy bore fruit. When Ajatashatru finally attacked, the Lichchhavis were so busy quarrelling among themselves that they were soundly defeated. The conflict between Ajatashatru and the Lichchhavis may have lasted over two decades, between 484 and 468 BCE. Ultimately, victory went to Magadha. This war of attrition in which the use of the classic strategy of creating dissension succeeded is described in Buddhist texts as the result of the Magadhans following the Buddha's advice.

War is closely related to Buddhist ideas of kingship and imperium. The elephant and horse, the two mounts of soldiers, appear in the list of the seven treasures of the *cakkavatti.* The early Buddhist tradition is a bit vague about how exactly a king becomes a *cakkavatti,* and this seems a conscious masking, even a denial, of the element of violence inherent in war. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the story of king Mahasammata in the Agganna Sutta does not mention war, while the Mahasudassana and Chakkavatti Sihanada Suttas do. Mahasudassana follows the wheel treasure with his fourfold army. Wherever the wheel stops, kings welcome him and invite him to rule over their domain; he gives them a message of Buddhist piety. It is not the king

but the wheel treasure that is victorious over the land from sea to sea. Of course, the *cakkavatti* Mahasudassana ultimately turns his back on royal life. King Dalhanemi is also described as victorious over the four quarters through dhamma, not through the use of force.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya,* the Buddha states that the five qualities that enable a king to abide where he has been victorious include the strength of his army divisions, which are loyal and alert to commands. One of the five possessions of a warrior king's son is skill in the elephant, horse, chariot, bow, and sword.[24] In the same text, the Buddha says that he had many a time been a righteous *cakkavatti* possessing the seven jewels, had been victorious up to the four ends of the earth, and had brought stability to the land. He says that he had had over a thousand brave sons who had vigorously crushed enemies. When he had attained victory over the sea-girdled earth, he had ruled righteously over it, needing neither rod nor sword.[25] So in his previous births, the Buddha had used military force successfully, and had given it up only when it was no longer needed.

War also features in Buddhist monastic discipline. According to the *Vinaya Pitaka,* soldiers could join the sangha only if released by the king. Monks were not supposed to visit the battlefield, except under special circumstances (such as if a kinsman was lying there on the verge of death). Such interdictions are not only found in the Pali *Tipitaka,* but also in later texts. In the Mahasamghika school, visiting the battlefield is one of *pācattika* offenses which require expiation and forfeiture. A lesser category of improper behavior (known as the Śaikṣya dharmas) includes a prohibition against teaching the dharma to one who has in his hand a knife, weapon, stick, or parasol. The Mulasarvastivadin school modifies this to one wielding a sword or wearing armor, a coat of mail, or a crown.[26] The allusions are to warriors, kings, and royal attendants who have not divested themselves of their trappings.

Notwithstanding the Buddhist emphasis on nonviolence, there were many arguments in the Buddhist doctrinal arsenal that could be used to justify killing, violence, and war. In Buddhism, suffering and death are intrinsic to the human condition. Could this not justify killing in war? Further, even though nonviolence is an important ethical precept, one who had achieved the highest state was above all such things. Did this mean that the distinction between violence and nonviolence was no longer relevant for an *arhat?*

The idea of the beneficial results of compassion in the course of war

is exemplified in the story of the birds' nests. In a battle between the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asuras*), the latter win. The gods withdraw toward the north, chased by the demons. As the chariots of the gods hurtle into the forest, Sakka (Indra) tells his charioteer Matali to be careful not to disturb the birds:

> "Avoid, O Matali, with your chariot pole
> The bird nests in the silk-cotton woods;
> Let's surrender our lives to the *asuras* [demons]
> Rather than make these birds nestless."[27]

The charioteer turns back the chariot yoked to a thousand horses. The demons think that the gods have returned for a second round of battle and flee in fear. Indra attains victory through the observance of nonviolence and compassion.[28]

However, certain Mahayana and Vajrayana texts seem to condone the idea of killing out of compassion. A story that is often cited in this context is that of a bodhisattva (significantly named Great Compassion') who kills a dacoit who is on the verge of killing five hundred men (who also happen to be bodhisattvas). He is said to have done so out of compassion, because many lives were saved by killing one, and the dacoit was saved from hell.[29] Further, although Mahayana schools of Buddhism advocate compassion and friendship toward all beings, the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) could be seen as diluting the moral imperative of nonviolence:

> Since the living being (*sattva*) does not exist, neither does the sin of murder. And since the sin of murder does not exist, there is no longer any reason to forbid it.… In killing then, given that the five aggregates (the five elements of conscious existence) are characteristically empty, similar to the visions of the dreams or reflections in a mirror, one commits no wrongdoing.[30]

There are also philosophical observations on the consequences of war. On one occasion, Ajatashatru marches with his fourfold army against Prasenajit of Kosala. There is a battle in which Ajatashatru is victorious, and Prasenajit retreats to his capital Shravasti. Next morning, the monks on their begging rounds hear of the happenings

and go back to narrate the events to the Buddha. The Buddha tells them that Ajatashatru has evil friends and companions, while Prasenajit has good ones. Nevertheless, the latter will sleep badly tonight because he has been defeated.

> "Victory breeds enmity,
> The defeated one sleeps badly.
> The peaceful one sleeps at ease,
> Having abandoned victory and defeat."[31]

This event is followed by another battle, in which Prasenajit defeats the aggressor Ajatashatru. He decides to confiscate all the latter's troops but to spare his life as he (Ajatashatru) is his nephew. The monks report this incident to the Buddha the next day. The Buddha's reaction suggests that war is like a see-saw, that an evil aggressor (Ajatashatru) will inevitably get his just deserts.

> "A man will go on plundering
> So long as it serves his ends,
> But when others plunder him,
> The plunderer is plundered.…
> The killer begets a killer,
> One who conquers a conqueror.
> The abuser begets abuse,
> The reviler, one who reviles.
> Thus by the unfolding of kamma
> The plunderer is plundered."[32]

But what about the fate of the ordinary human soldier? In the *Samyutta Nikaya,* the Buddha is asked by a headman of mercenaries named Yodhajiva whether it is true, as it is said, that warriors who are killed while fighting bravely in war are born in the company of battle-slain gods. The Buddha twice refuses to answer this question, but the third time, he states quite categorically:

> "When, headman, a mercenary is one who strives and exerts himself in battle, his mind is already low, depraved, misdirected by the thought: 'Let these beings be slain, slaughtered,

annihilated, destroyed, or exterminated.' If others then slay him and finish him off while he is striving and exerting himself in battle, with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the 'Battle-Slain Hell.' "[33]

The mercenary bursts into tears on hearing this, saying that he has been tricked into thinking otherwise by the teachers of old, and immediately becomes a follower of the Buddha. The Buddha gives a similar reply when asked the same question by an elephant warrior and a cavalry warrior named Assaroha. The message is clear: There is no heaven for warriors, not even for brave ones.

War features in many a Jataka story. Prince Temiya is so horrified at the violence inherent in kingship that he decides to become an ascetic.[34] Some Jatakas talk of the idea of nonresistance and inaction, even in the face of violent attack. Pious, virtuous, and kind king Mahasilava refuses to go to war or to resist when he is attacked. In fact, he sends his enemies away laden with presents. After being almost killed and managing to save himself and his men through great presence of mind and perseverance, he ultimately gets his kingdom back because the usurper is overwhelmed by his moral virtues.[35] Similarly, the bodhisattva born as the king of Banaras refuses his soldiers' entreaties to let them fight the enemy, saying:

> "I want no kingdom that must be kept by doing harm.... Do nothing at all."[36]

When the enemy arrives, he orders the city gates opened. The king and his courtiers are thrown in prison. The bodhisattva is filled with intense pity due to which the enemy king's body is racked with great pain. He is told that this is because he had thrown a righteous king into prison. He realizes his mistake, restores the bodhisattva to his throne, and promises to protect him from all enemies in future.

But there are many more Jataka stories where good kings, including bodhisattvas, fight wars. In the Bhojajaniya Jataka, the bodhisattva is born as a thoroughbred Sindh royal war horse, who participates with exceptional bravery and determination in a war. He gallops forward as the mount of a noble soldier whose king has been surrounded by seven enemy kings. Six enemy kings are captured. Although severely wounded, the bodhisattva horse refuses to allow his rider to mount another horse, because he knows that without him, the mission cannot succeed. He breaks down the seventh enemy camp and brings back the seventh king. Before dying, the war horse lectures the king on righteousness and justice, telling him not to kill the captive kings, but to bind them by oath and let them go. Having given this advice, he dies.[37] In another story, the bodhisattva is born as an elephant trainer's son, and serves as the trainer of a war elephant for a king who launches an attack against the king of Banaras. As the war commences, the king's elephant is terrified by the mayhem. The

trainer exhorts him to be brave, march onward, break the iron bar and pillars, crash through the gateway, and enter the town. The elephant's confidence is restored, and he decisively moves forward.[38]

The Maha Ummagga Jataka contains one of the rare references to *dhamma-yuddha* in early Buddhist literature, but the term does not have its usual meaning of righteous war.[39] The setting of the story is an impending war between Brahmadatta and the king of Videha. Instead of a war, it is decided to hold a different kind of contest. The Brahmana sages of the two sides will meet face to face, and victory will belong to the side whose sage salutes the other. This was the bright idea of Kevatta, the Brahmana sage of Brahmadatta; he thought that since he was older, his younger adversary Mahosadha would instinctively and naturally bow down in salutation. But Mahosadha, who is a bodhisattva, uses a clever stratagem. He offers Kevatta a heavy gem as a gift, dropping it onto the latter's finger tips. The gem rolls off and falls to the ground, and Kevatta instinctively bends down to pick it up. All see him bend. The Videhans win, and Brahmadatta's army flees. The aim of this story is to demonstrate a bodhisattva's use of skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*). *Dhamma-yuddha* here seems to refer to a victory being achieved without resort to battle.

The importance of war in the early Buddhist tradition is evident from two episodes that are an important part of Buddhist textual and visual narratives: the war of the relics and Mara's assault on the Buddha. The *Tipitaka* tells us that after the Buddha's cremation, the Mallas of Kushinagara were initially in possession of his bodily relics. For a week, they honored the relics in their assembly hall with garlands, music, singing, and dancing. They guarded the relics by encircling them with a lattice-work of spears and a wall of bows. But eight people learned of the Buddha's passing away. One of them was a Brahmana, and the rest were Kshatriya kings who put forward their claims to the relics on the grounds that like the Buddha, they were Kshatriyas.[40] The Mallas of Kushinagara initially displayed some belligerence. They were reluctant to part with any of the relics, on the grounds that the Buddha had passed away in their country. But eventually, matters were sorted out amicably through the intervention of a Brahmana named Drona, who urged that in line with the Buddha's teaching, conflict should be avoided and there should be a harmonious resolution to the dispute. Everyone agreed, and Drona apportioned the relics into eight parts among the Mallas of Kushinagara, Ajatashatru of Magadha, the Lichchhavis of Vaishali,

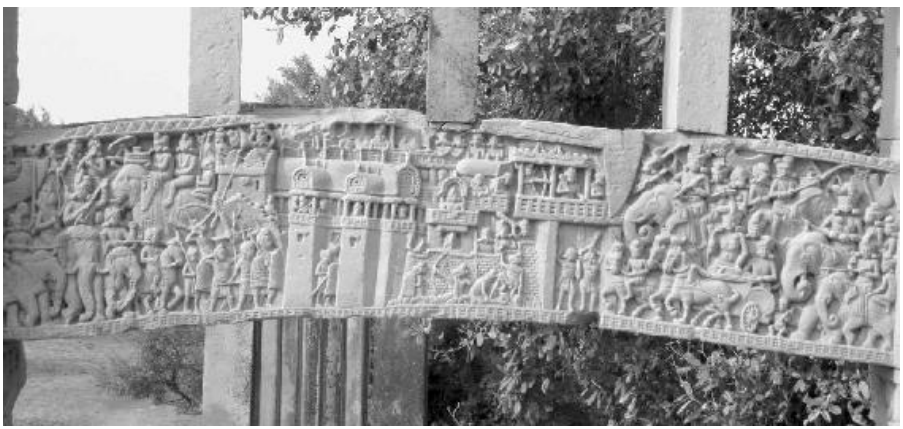
Shakyas of Kapilavastu, Bulayas of Allakappa, Koliyas of Ramagrama, a Brahmana of Vethadvipa, and the Mallas of Pava. The Moriyas of Pipphalivana received the embers, and Drona himself kept the funerary urn. All the recipients built stupas over their share of the sacred relics.

We have here a rare case of Kshatriya solidarity, old enmities temporarily receding in the wake of the demise of a great teacher who was revered by all. In later texts, there are descriptions of the Mallas' elaborate armed protection of the relics by arranging tightly packed concentric circles of elephants, horses, chariots, soldiers, and archers, and the conflict over the relics is described in heightened form. The kings who want their share of the relics are ready to wrest them by resorting to war. The Mallas respond by increasing their military preparedness, teaching their young girls, women, and boys the art of archery. Ajatashatru aggressively sets forth for the Malla kingdom accompanied by a fourfold army, prepared for war. But in all the textual versions of the incident, war is averted as the Brahmana Drona succeeds in brokering a peaceful settlement.[41]

However, relief sculptures at early historic Buddhist sites actually depict a "war of the relics." Sometimes the scene is represented in the form of a magnificent procession. Elsewhere, it has a strong martial air. For instance, on the lowest architrave of the Southern Gateway of the great Sanchi Stupa, there is a scene packed with dense, vigorous detail showing the siege of Kushinagara in full swing (Figure 8). The town's fortification wall is punctuated by gates and towers. Soldiers stand in the moat, others try to scale the wall, while the defenders hurl down arrows and stones from the ramparts. We see troops on foot, horses, elephants, and chariots, carrying bows, spears, swords, and perhaps clubs.[42] The artists had converted the textual descriptions of tension and possible war into a full-scale war. To the left and right of the scene, we see the seven kings riding off, the relics placed on the heads of their elephants.

The second important episode in which the idea of battle figures is Mara's assault on the meditating Siddhartha as he sits under the bodhi tree, on the verge of enlightenment. Ashvaghosha describes this battle in great detail in the *Buddhacharita.*[43] It is a physical and mental battle that takes place in one specific spot. Mara is identified as the god of love, Kama, with his flower arrows and colorful bow. An enemy of the true dharma and of *mokṣa,* Mara feels threatened; he is worried that if the Buddha attains enlightenment and propagates his doctrine, he will

conquer his domain. So he comes to the bodhi tree, determined to prevent this from happening. Mara addresses the prince as a Kshatriya; he tells him to abandon *mokṣa-dharma,* and asserts that mendicancy will bring him only ignominy. He urges him to follow Kshatriya dharma, which will win him fame and the realm of Indra. The evil one is accompanied by his three sons—restlessness, excitement, and conceit—and three daughters—pleasure, love, and desire.



8 The war of the relics; Sanchi Stupa 1, Southern Gateway

Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar

In Ashvaghosha's dramatic account, Mara places his children in front of him and shoots an arrow at Sarvarthasiddha, trying to arouse his erotic passion, but although the arrow hits its mark, it has no effect whatsoever. The meditating sage wears an armor of resolve and has as weapons the bow of courage and the arrow of insight. Mara's army is a real one, and their weapons and their attack are very material. The soldiers are hideous, deformed, bizarre fiends (*bhūtas*), armed with spears, trees, javelins, clubs, and swords. It is a great battle (*yuddha*)—the earth shakes, the wind rages, the oceans shudder. The fiends attack with their weapons, but they cannot touch the meditating Sarvarthasiddha, who is unperturbed by the mayhem around him. Mara's attack fails. The meditating sage is unmoved and has won victory by using resolve (*dhairya*) and calmness (*śama,* which also means peace). The delighted gods shower down flowers, and the Buddha-to-be moves into a trance, seeking the highest truth. It is not a coincidence that the prince who rejects kingship attains his goal after

fighting and winning a battle—a fierce and extraordinary one, his one and only one, fought sitting perfectly still under a tree. This war is also different from ordinary battles in that the stake is much higher: It is not a kingdom but the welfare of the world that hangs in the balance.

9 Mara's attack; Sanchi Stupa 1, Western Gateway

Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar

The scene of Mara's assault is carved at various places at Sanchi. On the back of the middle architrave of the Northern Gateway of Stupa 1, we see Mara, accompanied by his son and daughter, trying to tempt Siddhartha (represented by the bodhi tree); his ugly, grotesque troops are shown making merry, engaged in drinking, music, and dance. But on the back of the bottom lintel of the Western Gateway, there is a more dramatic and carefully detailed composition of the battle (see Figure 9). In the center of the scene is the *vajrāsana* (Diamond Throne) in a shrine, which has a tree emerging from the top (this symbolizes the Buddha). To the left, a procession of the gods accompanied by celestial musicians approaches the Buddha with folded hands, holding garlands or banners and waving scarves. In stark contrast to this orderly group, to the right of the *vajrāsana* we see a scene packed with tumult and chaos. Mara's soldiers (the expected ugly, deformed creatures), having failed to distract the meditating Siddhartha, are fleeing. It is a virtual stampede. The leaders are thrown off their horses or are leaning over the heads of their elephants. The soldiers, armed with axes and bows and arrows, are running and falling in

panic. One of them plunges his trident into the back of his fellow soldier by mistake. A figure on a horse-drawn chariot to the right seems to represent Mara. This scene is continued on the front of the bottom lintel, where we see two demons making a getaway on elephants, two riders, and some horses' heads, and several foot-soldiers standing, squatting, falling. There are saddle cloths on the backs of the horses; a demon is shown offering water to another from a gourd.[44] It is interesting to note that the war of the relics and Mara's vicious attack were chosen and displayed frequently and prominently at many early historic stupa sites. We also see them represented in the murals at Ajanta.[45] All this shows the importance of battle in the early Buddhist imagination.

In the Asian Buddhist world, the association between Buddha relics and warfare was to become even stronger; relics were often described and used as a justification for warfare in Sri Lanka and Burma.[46] Mara's assault also acquired great symbolic political significance in Asian Buddhist lands. For instance, during the sixth- century revolt of Buddhist monks under Faqing in Tang China, rebels described their violence as analogous to that of the Buddha against Mara and justified it accordingly.[47]

The Greeks on Indian Warfare

The first somewhat detailed account of armies of early historic north India comes not from Indian but from Greek texts. While Indian sources are completely silent on the Macedonian invasion of circa 327 / 326 BCE, this event became part of the legend of Alexander and contributed to the expanding Greek database on India. Alexander's historians described his march into India, the principalities he and his soldiers traversed, and the people and kings they encountered. Armed with their first-hand experience, Alexander's men refuted many of the wild stories about the Indians prevalent among the Greeks, though they also invented a few. Their battles proved, among other things, that the Indians were "much the finest fighters of the inhabitants of Asia at that time."[48] Descriptions of Alexander's encounters with Indian adversaries include the one with Porus, whose principality lay beyond the Hydaspes (Jhelum) River. Megasthenes is said to have observed that Alexander "was acquainted with Sandracottos, the greatest of the Indian kings, as well as with Porus, who was even greater."[49] This suggests a meeting between Alexander and Sandrocottos, that is, Chandragupta, who went on to establish the Maurya dynasty. We do not know whether the Greeks relied on good military intelligence, rumors, or both. But they speak of the great military might, wealth, and unpopularity of an Indian king named Agrammes or Xandrames who ruled in the east from his capital Palibothra (Pataliputra). He can be identified with Dhanananda, the Nanda king of Magadha. Curtius talks of his huge army, consisting of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2,000 chariots, and 3,000 elephants. The Macedonians ultimately never faced this army in the battlefield as they turned back from the Beas River.

The aspect of Indian warfare that fascinated and worried the Greeks more than anything else was the elephant. They had encountered Indian elephants in their battles against the Persians, and Alexander had received gifts of elephants from allies and defeated parties. Diodorus asserts that the Gangaridae had never been conquered by foreign nations because they had the most numerous and largest elephants, and foreign kings therefore feared them.[50] Alexander's soldiers' refusal to venture beyond the Beas may have been because they feared the Nanda army, known for its large number of

elephants.[51] The Greek awareness of the importance of war elephants explains the treaty concluded at a later date between Chandragupta Maurya and his Hellenistic counterpart, Seleucus Nicator. Apart from a matrimonial alliance, it involved the Maurya king receiving the provinces of Arachosia, Gedrosia, and the Paropanisadai (that is, Kandahar, Makran, and Kabul) in exchange for five hundred elephants.[52] The deal indicates the enormous military value of war elephants at the time.[53]

The Greeks refer to certain peculiarities of India's military history. Strabo reports that the Indians had never sent an army outside, and that no army from outside had ever succeeded in conquering them, except for the Greek gods Dionysos and Herakles, and more recently, Alexander. Arrian reports that Indians never went outside their homeland in order to wage wars on account of their laws.[54] The Greeks must have been surprised by this stay-at-home policy of Indian kings, which contrasted with their own far-flung military adventures, and perhaps could explain it only as the result of laws and prohibitions.

Megasthenes, whose account cannot be taken at face value, classifies Indian society into seven groups (*gene* or *mere*). This seems to have been his own invention and corresponds neither to the fourfold *varṇa* order nor to the more numerous and complex *jāti* (caste) system, although he does mention hereditary occupation and endogamy, which were important elements of the latter. The soldiers (*stratiogion* or *polimistai*) are fifth in the list and are described as second to the farmers in terms of numbers. They were well adapted to war, and needed relaxation and different kinds of amusement in times of peace. Soldiers, horses, and elephants were all maintained by the state.[55] The soldiers experienced the greatest freedom and contentment—others made their equipment, served in their camps, tended their horses, and drove their elephants and chariots. They were very well-paid and supported others; they fought during war and were cheerful during peacetime. The fourth class of Indian society (the *technitai* or *demiourgikon*) includes those who made weapons and built ships; they were maintained by the king and worked only for him. The commanding officer provided soldiers with weapons, and the naval commander rented ships to sailors and merchants.[56] We are told that Indian soldiers handed over their weapons and animals to the state. Arms were stored in the royal armory; horses and elephants were housed in royal stables. The Greeks also mention the military

administration of the Indians.[57] They refer to an administrative body dealing with military affairs, consisting of six groups of five members each, for the navy, commissariat, infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants.

The Greeks commented on an unusual Indian war practice. Diodorus observes:

> Both sides of those warring kill each other in battle, but they leave those farming unharmed as the common benefactors of all, and they do not burn the lands or cut down the trees of those fighting against them.[58]

Similarly, after talking about the philosophers (*philosophoi*), Arrian says the following about the farmers (*georgoi*):

> Second to them are the farmers, who are the most numerous of the Indians. They have no military weapons and no involvement in matters of war, but they work the land and pay taxes to the kings and the cities that are autonomous. If war occurs between the Indians, it is illegal to attack the land of these workers or to devastate the land itself, and while some are making war and killing each other as opportunity serves, others nearby are quietly ploughing or harvesting or pruning or reaping.[59]

This idyllic picture seems to be an exaggeration. In Greece, the burning of farmers' fields was a common aspect of war and led to acute food shortages. This practice seems to have been less visible in India to the Greeks (they may not have been in a position to actually observe Indian armies battle against one another), and they may have exaggerated the contrast. It may also have been part of their depiction of Indian society as an ideal one, where, as they marveled, food was never in short supply. Another element where there is an idealization of Indian military practice is the statement that the Indians live thriftily, especially when on military expeditions, and that there was hardly any theft in the huge military camp of Sandrocottos.[60]

As Alexander reluctantly turned home after many battles, apparently due to the mutinous mood of his soldiers, the Maurya king Chandragupta and later, his son Bindusara, waged wars and created

what is generally regarded as the first virtually all-India empire on the foundations of the military successes of the Nanda dynasty. (As mentioned earlier, continuous or effective Maurya military and fiscal control over such a vast area is highly unlikely.) But even more spectacular than the first two kings' military achievements was the ostentatious renunciation of war by the third Maurya king, Ashoka.

Ashoka, the Pacific Buddhist King

There are two diametrically opposite views of Ashoka's pacifism. One is that it irrevocably weakened the military basis of the empire, and the other is that this king's pacifism was tempered by a strong element of pragmatism and had little role to play in the decline of the Maurya empire. Ashoka's abjuring of war has also been interpreted as a stance taken by a king who had inherited a vast, virtually subcontinental empire, and for whom there was nothing left to conquer.[61] This is too simplistic a view. Ashoka's attitude toward war has to be situated within a larger web of ideas and represents a strong and reasoned moral response to the problem of violence.

In rock edict 4, Ashoka tells us that due to his practice of dhamma, the call of dhamma (*dhamma-ghosa*) had replaced the sound of the war drum (*bheri-ghosa*) and that the king had shown his people spectacles of aerial chariots, elephants, masses of fire, and other divine figures. In their reversal of key images associated with the battlefield, these statements figuratively but dramatically express the king's abjuring of warfare. Elsewhere, the announcement of his rejection of conventional military victory is accompanied by a rejection of the conventional basis of a king's fame. Ashoka states that he did not set much store by fame (*yasa, kīti*) except for that arising from his success in inducing people to follow *dhamma,* now and in the future (rock edict 10). This stands in stark contrast to the general basis of a king's fame in the ancient world, which rested to a considerable extent on his military achievements.

The most detailed and important statement on war is to be found in Ashoka's thirteenth rock edict, which begins by talking about a specific event:

> When Devanampiya Piyadassi [that is, Ashoka] had been consecrated eight years, he attained victory over the country of the Kalingas. One hundred and fifty thousand men were captured and deported, one hundred thousand were killed there, and many times this number died. After that, now that the Kalingas have been taken, Devanampiya is devoted to the ardent practice of dhamma, desire for dhamma and the teaching of dhamma. This is on account of the remorse [*anusocana*] of Devanampiya

over the victory over the Kalingas.[62]

So the most detailed description of a military victory in ancient Indian inscriptions consists of the king's reflections on its disastrous consequences! This includes a redefinition of the injury caused by war, and a redefinition of the idea of righteous victory. Ashoka observes that it is painful that people experience injury, capture and death in war.

> But what is considered even more painful by Devanampiya is the following—that Brahmanas and renunciants [*śramaṇas*], members of other sects and householders, who live there and practice obedience to superiors, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy and firm devotion to friends, acquaintances, companion and kin, as also to slaves and servants—they [all] experience injury, killing or deportation of their loved ones. This [suffering arising from war] is shared by all men and is considered painful by Devanampiya.[63]

Ashoka's argument is that the suffering caused by war extends far beyond those who suffer directly, physically. It includes the emotional pain suffered by those who hold these people dear. When such suffering is experienced by good people, it is especially regrettable. (This argument ties in with the Buddhist idea that the severity of violence can be measured, among other things, in proportion to the virtue of the victims.) Brahmanas and renunciants are said to live everywhere except among the Yavanas (Greeks), but members of sects live in *all* lands; causing suffering to them is deplorable. Good people also live everywhere; therefore, wherever it occurs, war is bad. Although the edict begins by citing high casualty figures designed to overawe, Ashoka asserts that even if a small fraction of those who had died or had been deported or had suffered as a result of his Kalinga campaign, he would still consider it terrible. This suggests that war per se is to be avoided, regardless of the scale of its violence. According to Ashoka, war is a cause of suffering for the victors, the vanquished, and countless others.

Although rock edict 13 focuses on the abjuring of fresh military campaigns, it does not abjure the use of force to suppress recalcitrant forest people and / or forest chieftains (*aṭavi*), who, in fact, posed a

serious impediment and challenge to the expansion of all premodern Indian states.[64] The king announces that he will forgive that which can be forgiven, and reminds the forest people of the power he possesses in spite of his sorrow and remorse, so that they do not suffer at his hands.[65] The forest people are included in the king's message on dhamma. But they are also told unequivocally that they should not provoke him. There is no hint of pain or suffering arising out of possible conflict here.

Rock edict 13 also announces the deployment of the metaphor of victory for a new dhammic purpose. *Dhamma-vijaya* (victory through *dhamma*) is not a conquest but a victory consisting of effectively propagating *dhamma.* Ashoka claims to have won such a victory in the dominion of the Yavana (Greek) king Antiyoka; beyond that, in the kingdoms of Turamaya, Antikini, Maka, and Alikasudara; and toward the south, in the domain of the Cholas and Pandyas, stretching as far south as Tamraparni (Sri Lanka). He asserts that he has won *dhamma-vijaya* in his own domain, among the Yavanas, Kambojas, Nabhakas, Nabhapanktis, Bhojas, Pitinikas, Andhras, and Pulindas.[66] We are told that even where the king's envoys do not go, people have heard of dhamma and are conforming to it. So Ashoka claims his dhamma victory to be universal, or at least universal in the world that he was familiar with. Clearly, he had an exaggerated idea of the success of his propagation of dhamma. But at the very least, we have here a reference to a very unusual kind of interaction with other kingdoms and one that does not fit into conventional molds of warfare or diplomacy.

Ashoka claims to have won his dhamma victory not once but repeatedly, suggesting that the inculcation of dhamma was not a one-time event but a constant "battle," requiring continuous exhortation and effort, with an eye not so much on this life as the next:

> Such a victory which has been thus won everywhere and repeatedly, leads to satisfaction [*piti*]. I have obtained satisfaction through this *dhamma-vijaya.* But this satisfaction means little. Devanampiya values only the fruits [of action] in the next world.[67]

Clearly, dhammic victory was the best victory, not because it gave the king satisfaction, which was of little consequence in itself, but

because it led to fruits in this world and, even more importantly, in the next. Ashoka goes on to tell us the reason why this edict on dhamma had been inscribed. It was

> so that my sons and grandsons should not think of a fresh military campaign, that if they do undertake such campaigns, they should take pleasure in mercy and inflict little force or punishment [*daṇḍa*], and that they should consider victory through dhamma as the only victory.[68]

Recognizing that his descendants would be disinclined to abjure war completely, Ashoka urges them to be merciful and moderate in their use of force or punishment, connecting these with war.

The edict suggests that as head of the state, the king is responsible for the totality of the consequences of war, not just for violence or injury caused by him personally. It also suggests that reflection and resolve can mitigate, possibly even cancel, the karmic consequences arising from such responsibility. However, out of sensitivity, shame, pragmatism, or a combination of all these things, the king did not put his pain and sorrow on display in Kaliṅga itself (rock edict 13 is replaced by separate rock edicts 1 and 2 at Dhauli and Jaugada) or at Sannati, another area that seem to have experienced the impact of Maurya armies.

There are no words for war or peace in rock edict 13. Instead, Ashoka talks of the injury, pain, and suffering caused by the violence of war. He talks of his own pain and the pain of others and of his ardent espousal and propagation of dhamma after the Kalinga war. His reaction to the event is usually understood as one of remorse (*anuṣaye / anusocana, anutapa*), but although there may be a thin line between remorse and grief, the tenor of rock edict 13 leans toward grief and a firm resolve emerging from it. It should also be noted that while Ashoka expresses his grief for the consequences of the war, he does not ask for forgiveness from anyone.

What explains this powerful reaction to the Kalinga war? Was it because Ashoka was an active participant in the campaign? This in itself is not a sufficient explanation, as legend has him putting down violent revolts in Taxila during his father Bindusara's time. It is not a sufficient explanation unless we assume that there was something unprecedented about the scale of violence in the Kalinga war. Does

rock edict 13 point to changes in the nature of warfare in third-century BCE India toward military conflicts that involved much higher levels of military deployment than before, higher casualties and mass deportation of captives, perhaps even of noncombatant citizenry? Do the rhetorical numbers mentioned in the beginning of the edict suggest that one of the most massive and brutal campaigns in ancient Indian history was launched during Ashoka's time and that the scale of devastation that followed in its wake turned the king's stomach? Did Ashoka suffer a personal loss—that of a dear son or a good friend—which forced him to reflect on how the impact of war extends far beyond those who are affected directly to those who are bound to them by ties of kinship and affection? Or was he already becoming more sensitive to violence due to his drawing closer to the Buddha's teaching with its emphasis on nonviolence? We can only speculate about what lay behind Ashoka's powerful antiwar proclamation. The inscription begins with a grim account of the universal suffering caused by a war and all wars but ends with a discussion of satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure, and reference to the attainment of higher fruits in the next world. The moral of the story is clear: Waging war does not lead to such fruits; following and propagating dhamma does. But (this will be discussed in further in Chapter 5) war against the forest people is placed in a different category altogether.

In Ashoka's post-Kalinga political philosophy, war and military victory are not considered essential parts of politics or empire. In fact, they are seen as undesirable and reprehensible; they have no place in the emperor's idea of a moral empire. If the message of rock edict 13 is reduced to its bare bones, it is as follows: The king had fought a terrible war against the people of Kalinga. War is deplorable because it causes incalculable, universal suffering. A king cannot attain heaven if he wages war. Action against rebellious forest people, however, is different from regular war. In formulating and proclaiming his detailed critique of war and following up the critique with concrete action, Ashoka intervened in the ancient Indian discourse on political violence in a very significant and unusual way. His attitude toward war is radical, even by Buddhist standards. And it is ultimately based on ideas related with merit, demerit, and the afterlife. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ashoka was given a makeover in the early centuries CE, one that is at variance with his epigraphic autobiography. Interestingly, there is no hint of pacifism or the renunciation of war in the *Ashokavadana*'s story of the king's life.

We have seen in Chapter 1 that the Achaemenid king Darius boasted of having crushed rebels and achieved many military victories. In searching for a possible parallel to Ashoka in the ancient world, we have to go further back to the first Achaemenid king Cyrus and an inscription on the Cyrus Cylinder, which describes his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE.[69] The inscription tells us that the god Marduk commanded Cyrus to march against the king of Babylon Nabonidus and that the god walked by his side like a friend and companion. The vast army was like the water in a river and could not be counted, but Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle being fought. It was a bloodless victory. Cyrus announced himself as the "king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world." All other kings acknowledged his paramountcy and brought him tribute and kissed his feet. The inscription also describes Cyrus as one who had "enabled all the lands to live in peace." But this declaration involves a post-facto justification of military campaigns and talks of a peace established at the conclusion of a successful military career. Although there are some similarities in the mention of the gods, the description of a momentous military campaign, and the idea of a universal empire, there is a world of difference between the attitude toward war in the Cyrus Cylinder and Ashoka's thirteenth rock edict. The Achaemenid inscription describes what must have been a bloody war as a bloodless one; Ashoka highlights the death and suffering caused by a war. Cyrus fights many battles and proclaims himself universal emperor. Ashoka fights one battle and declares himself a universal emperor on account of his propagation of virtue.

A closer comparison can perhaps be sought in ancient China, where the Mohists (fifth to third centuries BCE) advocated a policy of disarmament. Further, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lü Buwei has the idea of righteous warfare. This work talks of an army that justifies its attack on the grounds of moral superiority and seizes the goods of those who have acted against the Way of Heaven, but spares the lives and goods of those who submit.[70] This text was written in the third century BCE, round about Ashoka's time, but its idea of righteous warfare does not correspond at all Ashoka's idea of *dhamma-vijaya*. Ashoka's radical renunciation of war is unprecedented and unparalleled.

War in the *Mahabharata*

Much more part of the mainstream Indian tradition were the ideas about war expressed in the Sanskrit epics, which give us the first long, detailed descriptions of war, its causes, progress, and consequences. The *Mahabharata* refers to many conflicts between gods and demons and between men and men. But there is one great war that stands at the center of the epic, the one fought on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The first five books of the epic give the prelude to the war, the next six deal with the war and its immediate aftermath, and the last seven deal with the immediate as well as long-term aftermath, ending with the death of the Pandavas and their ascent to heaven.[71] It is possible that the epic was woven around the memory of an actual conflict between warring kin. However, we are concerned here not with the question of the historicity of the war, but rather with what the epic has to say about war and peace. The *Mahabharata* talks of many things, but the relationship between dharma and war is one of its central concerns.

The conflict between the Kauravas and Pandavas is an old, deeply rooted one, going back to their childhood. But the proximate causes are Duryodhana's refusal to give the Pandavas their share of the kingdom and the humiliating disrobing of the Pandavas' collective wife Draupadi in the assembly after Yudhishthira's loses everything, including himself, in a gambling match. As events unfold, the war ends up being not just between the Pandavas and Kauravas, but between their two confederate armies, which include all the kings of the epic world. In this sense, the Mahabharata war is a world war.

The conflict has cosmic dimensions. It is another episode in the age-old turf war between the gods and the demons. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Pandavas are described as partial incarnations of various deities; Duryodhana was born from the evil Kali (a personification of the Kali age), and his brothers were demons born among men. Gods, demi-gods, and celestials appear frequently as participants and spectators of the great war. The most important god is Krishna, a deity with a complex character, who plays a pivotal role in the unfolding of the story. What makes this round of the god–demon conflict different from earlier ones is that this time, the gods and demons are fighting each other in human form. And yet, while the

audience of the epic would have presumably been aware of the higher, cosmic aspect of the war, the main characters seem oblivious of it.

The men who confront one another at Kurukshetra are tied to each other in many ways through kinship, friendship, and teacher-pupil bonds. Before the battle begins, Yudhishthira makes an extraordinary gesture. He approaches the elders Bhishma, Drona, and Kripa and asks their permission to fight, and also asks them how they can be killed. They give him the blessings as well as the advice he seeks. It is the strong bonds of affection between the two "enemy" sides that lead Duryodhana to constantly accuse his generals Bhishma and Drona of not fighting hard enough against the Pandavas. The agony of the conflict is most graphically reflected in Arjuna's initial refusal to take up arms on the eve of the battle. But ultimately, fight he does.

Although war is ultimately inevitable, the *Mahabharata* presents it as a last resort. There is also the idea of contest in lieu of war. The Kaurava idea of challenging the Pandavas to a dicing game is a strategy aimed at destroying them without war, and hinges on Yudhishthira's passion for and lack of skill in gambling. The Pandavas are sent into exile after the second dicing match to buy time for the Kauravas to strengthen themselves. In fact, even during the war, there is a Kaurava plan to corner Yudhishthira, make him gamble yet again, and pack the Pandavas off to the forest for a second exile, but it does not come to pass. Even after all the disastrous results of his predilection for gambling, Yudhishthira does not learn his lesson about taking unnecessary risks. After the end of the war, he stakes the entire kingdom on the outcome of a duel between Duryodhana and Bhima.

There are attempts to use negotiation to settle the political dispute peacefully. Dhritarashtra tries this by dividing the kingdom into two parts—the Kauravas ruling from Hastinapura and the Pandavas building a new capital at Indraprastha. The issue of war versus peace is debated often in the Kaurava and Pandava camps in the build-up toward war. Many characters repeatedly plead with Duryodhana to make peace with his cousins. Envoys and spies move between the two camps. At the same time, there is a sense of foreknowing among the participants and the audience / reader that these attempts are not likely to succeed, that Duryodhana will not bend, that the war will happen.

Three peace missions are described in the Udyoga Parva—those of Drupada's household priest, Samjaya, and Krishna. The aim of these missions is to try to convince not only Duryodhana (chances of which are acknowledged as very slim), but also those around him, so that they may either urge him to change his mind or create dissension in the Kaurava camp. The arguments that are put forward include one that asserts that the Pandavas want only what is rightfully theirs and that theirs is therefore a just cause. A very pragmatic reason is also put forward for accepting a negotiated settlement. Duryodhana is told that the Pandavas cannot be defeated in war; that the side on which Krishna is will win; that Krishna and Arjuna are invincible; that the gods are on the Pandavas' side. The fact that Duryodhana remains impassive in the face of all these arguments shows his enormous

ignorance and arrogance. His ignorance leads him to claim that the gods will not interfere in human affairs and his arrogance makes him boast that he is more powerful than they.[72] Perhaps his over-confidence stems from the fact that he has been told by the demons that he was created by Shiva and the goddess Devi for their sake, and that they will ensure his victory. The Pandavas reduce their demands in order to maintain peace, and at a certain point in the negotiations, Yudhishthira whittles these down to just five villages. But Duryodhana is impervious to reason and is not prepared to give even a speck of land to his cousins.

The main reason for the various negotiations and embassies is to exhaust all options and to buy time for the war preparations. The war advocates are led by Duryodhana and include Karna (who is actually the Pandavas' brother). On the Pandava side, Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas, is for war. She wants vengeance for the various humiliations she has been made to suffer because of the Kauravas. The peace advocates on various occasions include Vyasa, Krishna, Drona, Ashvatthama, Bhishma, Vidura, and Gandhari. On one occasion, even the normally bellicose Bhima urges peace. Among the Kaurava brothers, Vikarna consistently argues for peace. Dhritarashtra also on occasion urges peace, though he is more often than not seen protesting plaintively that he cannot prevent Duryodhana from doing what he wants to do. The sage Maitreya pronounces a curse on Duryodhana that if he does not seek peace, there will be a terrible war in which Bhima will smash his thigh with his club. Before and throughout the course of the battle, there are repeated pleas for peace from many characters, but Duryodhana dismisses them all. Krishna twice uses diplomacy to try to win Karna over to the Pandava side. He does not succeed because Karna does not swerve in his loyalty to Duryodhana. In fact, ultimately, there is only one notable defector. When Yudhishthira asks the Kaurava enemy if anyone wants to come over to their side, Yuyutsu, half-brother of the Kauravas, is the only one who crosses over. Apart from the votaries of peace and war, there are also those who are undecided. Yudhishthira does not want to rush into war, not only on moral, but also on pragmatic grounds. He is worried about the risks of war and is uncertain of victory.

The idea that war should always be a last resort is asserted on several occasions in the didactic portions of the *Mahabharata.* In the Shanti Parva, Bhishma tells Yudhishthira that victories won without fighting are better than those won through war. He also declares that

victory and defeat are both impermanent and must be endured.[73] The sage Vamadeva states that victory achieved through war is said to be of the lowest kind.[74] Conciliation is much better than war. The worst kind of victory is that won through war. War should be a last option, to be exercised only after all the other expedients have been tried and have failed.

But in spite of the attempts at negotiation, peace missions, and the arguments against war, the *Mahabharata*—like the *Ramayana*—is not a text that advocates peace. This is the case whether we look at the narrative or the emphasis of the didactic portions, or even at how the epic may have been received in different forms and media by audiences over the centuries. War is central to both epics. It is impossible to conceive of either of them without the wars, which were understood by the composers as well as audiences as ultimately necessary and also righteous.

The *Mahabharata* graphically reveals the bitter rivalry and hostility that must have existed between collateral kin among political elites, which is usually elided in the epigraphic *praśastis*. The desirability of unity within the lineage is emphasized. Using striking imagery, Vidura says that the Kauravas are like a forest and the Pandavas like the tigers who live there; neither can exist without the other.[75] The arguments are made even more forcefully and eloquently by Krishna. Quarrels among kinsmen lead to ruin; the Kauravas and Pandavas should unite and rule the earth. If the Kauravas go to war, there will be great loss of life, they will incur great unhappiness, and the earth will be destroyed; if they listen to counsel and unite with their cousins, they will gain sovereignty over the earth. In war, there is no good, no dharma, no *artha* (material gain), no happiness.[76] Victory is never certain. Krishna urges Dhritarashtra to give up Duryodhana, and thereby prevent the war, for the sake of the larger good. The verse he recites in support of this is repeated on several occasions in the epic:

> Give up one man for the sake of the family; give up one family for the sake of the village; give up one village for the sake of the kingdom; give up the earth for the sake of yourself![77]

But at some point, war becomes inevitable. The Udyoga Parva ends with both armies marching out toward Kurukshetra. In a sense, the characters themselves have fore-knowledge of its inevitability as well

as its outcome. From the Pandavas' point of view, it is a just war. They are good; Duryodhayana is evil. They represent dharma, the Kauravas *adharma*.

There are two points of view on war and violence in the *Mahabharata*. The first is that a Kshatriya is obliged to engage in a certain amount of violence in the discharge of his duties. Necessary and unavoidable violence is distinguished from avoidable violence; it is not killing per se that is deplored, but the killing of kin. The second view is that all forms of violence incur sin and this sin must be expiated. This is clear from the fact that at the end of the war, Yudhishthira performs the *aśvamedha* as expiation. The story emphasizes violence. But the didactic portions introduce nonviolence as an important aspect of dharma. This sits uncomfortably with the main narrative, which is very, very bloody.

The *Mahabharata* tells us that Kshatriya dharma is said to have originated from the first god; it is the oldest dharma in the world, contains all other dharmas, and is therefore the most excellent one. It is eternal and never decays. *Kṣatra* (the power of the Kshatriya) was created to kill the barbarians (*dasyus*) and to protect the Vedas. It was exercised by Vishnu to defeat the enemies of the gods. Killing is the primary aspect of Kshatriya dharma, and a Kshatriya king's most important duty is to destroy barbarians.[78]

By and large, the *Mahabharata* talks of war being the job of a hereditary martial class—the Kshatriyas. In times of emergency, however, the situation is different. If Kshatriyas act against Brahmanas, the latter are justified in protecting themselves by any means, including taking up arms. There are unusual circumstances in which it is permissible for Brahmanas to take up arms and for non-Kshatriyas to rule. A Brahmana can take up arms in three situations: if his life is in danger; if the *varṇa* order gets corrupted; or if he is faced with an exceptionally difficult situation. In fact, if the *varṇa* order is threatened, if barbarians create lawlessness and chaos, or if Brahmanas are under threat, men of all *varṇas* can take up arms. But these things should happen only in times of extreme adversity and crisis. There are martial Brahmanas in the *Mahabharata* such as Rama Jamadagnya and Drona. But although Drona is respected by both sides, he is also criticized for having transgressed dharma by having adopted the Kshatriya way.

Although Kshatriya dharma has many advocates, its unpleasant results are there for all to see, and Yudhishthira condemns it on more than one occasion. In a debate on the issue with his brother Arjuna, he exclaims:

> "Damn the *kṣatra* way! … Damn the unforgiving stubbornness that brought us to this disaster! Good are the tolerance, self-control, sincerity, harmonious disposition, unselfishness, harmlessness, and truthful speech that are the constant traits of those who dwell in the forest. But we, because of our greed and our confusion, were proud and stubbornly arrogant. We have been brought to this condition by our desire to possess the trifling kingdom. But now that we have seen our kinsmen who

pursued that prize lying dead upon the ground, no one could make us rejoice at being king, not even with being king of all the three worlds."[79]

The day-by-day reportage of the terrible eighteen-day war tells us of the thousands of men who were killed every day. Duels are an important part of the great war but the difference between the two is understood.[80] There are numerous accounts of one-to-one battles, and the great heroes on both sides (especially Arjuna, Bhishma, and Drona) are described as single-handedly killing several thousand unnamed opponents. What drives the battle forward is the systematic killing of the leading Kaurava warriors till they are whittled down to three. On the Pandava side, too, the focus is on the death of certain great warriors; the Pandavas themselves miraculously survive.

The *Mahabharata* refers to a fourfold army consisting of infantry, elephant corps, cavalry, and chariot corps, but also mentions a sixfold army, which includes machines (*yantra*) (the sixth element is unspecified).[81] There is also reference to an eightfold army, which, apart from the standard four elements, includes the navy, workers, guides, and spies. The Shanti Parva contains a detailed discussion of military tactics and battle formations. The disquisition has largely to do with how to kill especially strong and troublesome opponents by fair or foul means, distracting them and forcing them into a corner. There is discussion of the best time to march, the best terrain suitable for the different wings of the army, and the different ways of fighting adopted by different people. The strategies recommended include creating magical illusions (*māyā*). Destructive methods and damaging crops are not recommended. The war is high on action and emotion; anger, love, grief, and fear are constantly on display. Many oaths are taken during the war; all of them are fulfilled.

Although they are sometimes on elephant back, the heroes usually ride into battle in magnificent chariots, with distinctive banners, sometimes hopping from one chariot to another. The crucial role of the charioteer is indicated by Krishna, who guides Arjuna to victory, and Shalya, who does his best to demoralize Karna. On occasion, there is arm-to-arm combat, but the warriors usually fight with a wide array of weapons—bows and arrows are the most common, but swords, spears, maces, clubs, lances, axes, and rocks are also used. Great weapons have names, such as Arjuna's bow, Gandiva. Magical and celestial weapons also play their part, though sometimes they refuse to work. There is also the idea of the ultimate weapon—one that

renders all other weapons ineffective and destroys its target, and can be resisted only by ceasing all physical and mental resistance. This is the great weapon received by Ashvatthama from his father, Drona, who himself had obtained it from the god Narayana. As this weapon wreaks havoc among the Pandava side, Krishna tells the warriors that there is only one way they can withstand its destructive potential: They must dismount from their chariots, throw away their weapons, and offer no resistance. They do so, and the weapon is stilled.[82]

The epic's description of the battlefield does not flinch from graphic details of the carnage. The bodies of warriors, pierced by arrows, look like porcupines. As Arjuna showers arrows on his adversaries, a terrible river starts flowing on the battlefield:

> Its water was blood from the wounds of weapons on men's bodies, its foam human fat; broad in current, it flowed very swiftly, terrible to see and to hear. Corpses of elephants and horses formed its banks, the entrails, marrow and flesh of men its mud. Ghosts and great throngs of demons lined its banks. Its waterweed was hair attached to human skulls, its billows severed pieces of armour, as it bore along thousands of bodies in heaps. Fragments of the bones of men, horses and elephants formed the gravel of that fearful, destructive, hellish river; crows, jackals, vultures and storks, and throngs of carrion beasts and hyenas were approaching its banks from every direction.[83]

The dust and din of war are tremendous. Apart from conches and drums of different kinds, the twang of bowstrings and the noise of chariot wheels, there are the warriors' roars of anger and exultation. War is a noisy affair.

In line with the glorification of war is its poetic aestheticization. The battlefield is terrifying and yet splendid. The young warrior Abhimanyu scatters the earth with the bodies, limbs, and heads of enemies. Handsome, fair-featured, decked with beautiful earrings, and covered with beautiful garlands, diadems, and turbans, studded with diamonds and jewels, the dead warriors, with blood flowing out, look like stemless lotuses, or the sun, or the moon.[84] When Abhimanyu is killed,

> the earth was most splendid to see, like a full-moon sky

> wreathed in stars, for it was flooded with pools of blood, and strewn with gold-shafted arrows and with the heads of heroes, still gleaming with their earrings.[85]

But the glorification and aestheticization of war in the *Mahabharata* are considerably marred by the enormous grief and guilt that follow the Pandavas' triumph.

As is the case with warrior cultures in other parts of the world, the *Mahabharata* knows an elaborate honor code in war. Kshatriya dharma overlaps with, but is broader than, this code. When the demands of Kshatriya dharma conflict with this code, the former takes precedence. Victory must be achieved at all cost. During the war, Yudhishthira's dharma is somewhat different from the dharma of the average Kshatriya warrior, because his dharma as a warrior intersects with the dharma of a would-be king. This means that he is not obliged to fight to the death, but must fight to the best of his ability in order to win the kingdom.

The dictates of the code of honor are many. Arrows should not be smeared with poison, nor should barbed arrows be used. A wounded man must not be attacked, nor should one whose vehicle has been destroyed. Soldiers must never abandon other soldiers on the battlefield. Old men, women, Brahmanas, and those who have surrendered must not be killed. Low blows are not to be given. But many tenets of this code are violated in the course of the war. The god Krishna is, in fact, an arch advocate of the breaching of the warrior's honor code. Krishna is both engaged and disengaged in the war. He has taken a vow only to be Arjuna's charioteer and not to actually fight. With one exception (Shishupala), he never kills directly. He uses others as instruments, often ostensibly because he knows what has been decreed by fate. Krishna lists the warriors he has killed through stratagems. It is not personal. He is happy at the killing of Bhima's son Ghatotkacha, because he knows that Karna has used up Indra's weapon on him and is therefore vulnerable. In the battle between Bhima and Duryodhana, Krishna tells Arjuna that Bhima cannot win in fair fight; Arjuna signals to Bhima by touching his thigh, and Bhima brings down his club, smashing his opponent's thigh. Krishna defends this ignoble act, saying that even the gods practice deception.[86] Even before this, the Pandavas have engaged in many deceitful and ignoble tactics in killing Drona (announcing that Ashvatthama—the name of his son—was dead) and Karna (killing him while he sought to free his chariot wheel from the mud). The Kauravas also indulge in unfair, dishonorable combat, for instance, in their coming together to kill a single combatant, the young Abhimanyu.

But such violations are commented on and receive censure. The

manner in which Abhimanyu is killed leads the gods to exclaim, “This is not dharma!”[87] Balarama is unconvinced by his brother Krishna’s explanations about why it was all right for Bhima to fell Duryodhana with a low blow, and is very vocal about his disapproval. Duryodhana gives a long list of Krishna’s wrong-doings even as the latter defends himself. As Krishna explains, the Pandavas could not have won the war in a fair fight. Yet even Arjuna criticizes the way in which Yudhishthira connived at Drona’s killing for the sake of the kingdom. After such a wicked act, he says, death is better than life.[88] The *Mahabharata* leaves no doubt that such actions are violations of the warrior’s code of honor. Although no side comes out with flying colors, the epic does make it amply clear that the Pandavas score higher marks.

The *Mahabharata* talks about righteous victory (*dharma-vijaya*), which partly overlaps with, but is greater than, the warrior’s honor code. In the *Mahabharata,* the idea of a righteous war (*dharma-yuddha*) involves fighting for one’s right, and right is defined by primogeniture. It also involves a conciliatory and benevolent attitude toward defeated enemies and their subjects. Enemies should be restrained but not unnecessarily tormented or annihilated; the king should treat them as though they were his own children. Once the people of the defeated king have been made to bow through the use of force, the king should swiftly try to make them happy through the use of conciliatory words and lavish gifts, in return for taxes. After victory, the king should practice forgiveness, even toward enemies who have committed great offenses against him. This enhances his fame.

So what does the *Mahabharata* really mean when it declares the great war to be a war of dharma or when Krishna asserts that Yudhishthira has conquered the earth through dharma? What does it mean when it says that victory lies where dharma is, or where Krishna is?[89] Or when it states that Krishna is dharma? It seems that the dharmic war is one that can involve deceit but is fought for upholding the right of primogeniture. But there are also good theological reasons why this is a dharmic war. The Pandavas are semidivine; Krishna fights on their side. As the epic tells us several times, where Krishna is, lie dharma and victory.

The *Mahabharata* war can be seen as the swan song of the old-fashioned idea of the Kshatriya warrior, one who is noble and born into a family of hereditary warrior elites. In this world, brave warriors are willing to fight unto death, and such men are eminently worthy of honor and respect. The names of the two chief protagonists—Yudhisththira, Duryodhana—suggest that one is steadfast in war and that the other fights unfairly. Martial epithets abound, and the heroes are compared with powerful animals like the bull, elephant, tiger, and lion. But the warrior–heroism equation is not a simple one. Yudhishthira belies his name (which means steadfast in war) by vacillating a great deal and spending much time agonizing about his moral dilemmas. He goes through most of the battle without especially distinguishing himself, and seems to come to life only on the last day, when he kills Shalya with a spear. Brave warriors sometimes flee when the going gets tough. There are also warriors who are not brave. Prince Uttara, for instance, is terrified of going into battle and runs away. Arjuna has to drag him back, and instils courage into the novice warrior.

War is associated with masculinity, but the *Mahabharata* characters are not entirely gender stereotypes. Yudhishthira is weak and vacillating. His wife Draupadi, "the dark one," is aggressive and assertive.[90] Her very birth is connected with hurtling the Kshatriya order toward the catastrophic war. An even more interesting set of episodes are those in which war is associated with androgynous characters. The androgyny of the Hindu gods is reflected most powerfully in the idea of Shiva as Ardhanarishvara (the god who is half woman), but androgynous elements in the portrayal of certain warriors in the *Mahabharata* are of a different order and are suggestive of an enigmatic sexual ambiguity. During the year that the Pandavas spend incognito in the court of the Matsya king Virata, Arjuna chooses to take on the disguise of a eunuch named Brihannada (the name literally means "one with a big reed or phallus"). A feminized Arjuna teaches singing and dancing to the women of Virata's harem. While this confirms him as a ladies' man, there is something incongruous and comic in his rushing out to battle against the Kauravas to rescue the Matsya prince, dressed in woman's attire, his braids flying in the air. Another striking androgynous warrior image is that of Amba, who

is temporarily transformed in a subsequent birth into the male Shikhandi, in order to get revenge on Bhishma by killing him. Bhishma cannot be killed by a man and refuses to fight an adversary who was formerly a woman. Not surprisingly, these episodes have lent themselves to endless speculation about the precise nature of the transsexuality of these characters and a wide range of psychoanalytical interpretations.[91] At the very least, in these episodes, the epic gives an interesting twist to the association of war with masculinity. However, leaving aside these episodes, bravery in war is generally associated with manliness, and the charge of being unmanly or a eunuch is considered an insult.

Bhishma represents the old Kshatriya order. Arjuna and Karna are the two greatest warriors of the younger generation. The two are equally matched in terms of military skill but there are many differences between them. Karna represents the old-world warrior qualities combined with two qualities more associated with kingship and the dharma common to all: generosity and truth. He goes into battle burdened with the knowledge that he is not likely to survive. He declares that he does not fear death as much as he fears untruth. Although in the events leading up to the war he comes across as a belligerent member of the war mongers, during the course of the war, he scores several times on account of his honorable conduct. He is one of the few great warriors who adheres unwaveringly to the warrior code. He does not kill an unarmed Bhima. He lets the Pandava prince Sahadeva go as he is not his equal in war, simply touching him with the tip of his bow. He spares prince Nakula because of the promise he had made to their mother, Kunti. Karna fights by the old rules of honor and dies in the process. He is a tragic hero.

Arjuna, ambidextrous and amazingly proficient in arms, is the new-age warrior. If there is one single true hero in the epic, it is he. He suffers and struggles constantly. When going to dutifully fetch his bow to protect a Brahmana harassed by cattle thieves, he knowingly violates an agreement among the Pandavas that anyone who sets eyes on their wife Draupadi lying with another brother should go into celibate exile for twelve years (actually Arjuna is not entirely celibate during the period). In addition, he spends five long years away from his brothers in search of celestial weapons. He fights relentlessly and furiously, burdened with the knowledge that the outcome of the war and the victory of his side depend to a great extent on him. He loses his sons in battle, and this is a grief that he finds hard to bear. Several

years after the war, Arjuna suffers deeply at the death of his friend and mentor Krishna. The grief-stricken Arjuna performs the last rites of Krishna's people, the Vrishnis; rescues the Vrishni women, children, and aged people; and fights the Abhiras who attack them as they flee Dvaraka. Arjuna has aspects of what must have been an age-old heroic ideal. But he has new-age elements of doubt about the righteousness of what he is doing. He is also a new-age warrior in that he is a *bhakta* warrior—a warrior who is also an ardent devotee of a great god Krishna. Friendship and single-minded devotion are the hallmarks of the relationship between this warrior and his god.

Against the background of the Kshatriya order having have been exterminated many times, the *Mahabharata* emphasizes a Kshatriya dharma wherein the warrior is wedded firmly to the dharma of *varṇa* and *āśrama,* fights for his political goals, ignores kinship ties, and has a close relationship with the gods and Brahmanas. It is shameful if a Kshatriya dies at home in his bed. A warrior should die fighting fiercely in battle, his body mangled by the blades of weapons. One who dies thus attains heaven. The usual food offerings and libations and the observation of a period of impurity by kin are not required in his case. This kind of death should not be mourned (although we know that it is!).

However, the *Mahabharata* reflects an awareness that the attainment of heaven—the traditional goal of the warrior—is no longer enough. And the warrior's duty, although reiterated frequently, is also debated, questioned, redefined, and given a new philosophical content. The new approach to war connects inner and outer battles. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira that a king must first conquer himself and then his enemies. The battle within has to be fought in the mind—alone, sans weapons, without the support of allies or kin. Winning this battle helps attaining victory over enemies in the outer war.[92] Yudhishthira wins the outer battle but continues to fight the inner one till his death.

The preeminent philosophical instruction on war in the *Mahabharata* is contained in the *Bhagavadgita,* and it is given to Arjuna and not to Yudhishthira, because Arjuna is the quintessential warrior. As mentioned earlier, the events and discourse of the *Bhagavadgita* take place at a time when peace negotiations have failed and war is not only imminent but is about to begin. The two armies stand surveying each other, face to face.

Arjuna's problem in the *Bhagavadgita* is not related to war in general; rather, it is with a war that involves the killing of close kin, teachers, and friends. When he surveys his own kin (*sva-jana*) arrayed in battle before him, Arjuna finds his mouth going dry, his body feels weak and tremulous, his bow slips from his grasp. His mind is filled with terrible confusion. He voices his anxieties to Krishna. The killing of kin leads to the destruction of the lineage (*kula-kṣaya*) and the corruption of women of the lineage, which in turn lead to social disorder (*varṇa-saṁkara*). Surely fighting such a war would be a great sin (*pāpa*). The great Pandava warrior dramatically puts away his bow and arrows and sits down in his chariot. He does not want to fight.

Krishna urges Arjuna pick up his weapons and fight the enemy. He uses three sets of arguments to persuade him do so. One fits in which the old heroic culture, but the other two are based on a new philosophical synthesis and a new idea of godhead. The first set of arguments emphasizes the importance of following one's dharma (*sva-dharma*), understood as the dharma of the *varṇas*, in Arjuna's case, the Kshatriya dharma. For a Kshatriya, there can be nothing greater than a righteous war (*dharmya yuddha*) such as this; it is few who have the privilege of fighting such a war. The heroic warrior who fights fearlessly unto death attains heaven. Such a death brings unending fame. Not fighting brings in its wake accusations of cowardice, guilt, and unending shame and dishonor, which are much worse than death.

The second set of arguments is philosophical. We have already noted in Chapter 1 that Krishna's long, detailed response to Arjuna contains a unique combination of elements of Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta philosophies with the ideas of duty and devotion (*bhakti*), and a new definition of renunciation. The goal that the *Bhagavadgita* ends with is not heaven but liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa*). Death is inevitable and should not cause the wise man any

grief. The embodied eternal self (*ātman*) is eternal and indestructible; it is not born and does not die; on the passing away of one body, it moves on to inhabit another.

> "As a man discards his worn-out clothes
> And puts on different ones that are new,
> So the one in the body discards aged bodies
> And joins with other ones that are new."[93]

Killing in battle is not something to be concerned about, because it is the physical body of the enemy that is killed. The *ātman* is beyond reach.

> "Swords do not cut him, fire does not burn him, water does not wet him, wind does not parch him. He cannot be burned, wetted, or parched, for he is eternal, ubiquitous, stable, unmoving, and forever."[94]

The wise man has mastery over his senses and remains unperturbed and unmoved in all circumstances. He performs his duty without thinking of the consequences of his actions.

> "Either you are killed and will then attain to heaven, or you triumph and will enjoy the earth. Therefore rise up, Kaunteya [son of Kunti, Arjuna], resolved upon battle! Holding alike happiness and unhappiness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, yoke yourself to the battle, and so do not incur evil."[95]

The third set of arguments in Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna rests on a new idea of godhead proclaimed in the text. In the eleventh book of the *Bhagavadgita,* Krishna reveals to Arjuna his powerful and terrifying infinite, universal form, one impossible to see with ordinary eyes. Arjuna sees this blazing form with its many arms, legs, eyes, bellies, and mouths, wearing divine ornaments, adorned with celestial garments, and anointed with divine perfumes. Arjuna tells Krishna that he sees that the sons of Dhritarashtra along with the warriors of the other kings of the earth, like Bhishma, Drona, and Karna, as well as the leading warriors of the Pandavas

"Are hastening into your numerous mouths
That are spiky with tusks and horrifying—
There are some who are dangling between your teeth,
Their heads already crushed to bits.

As many a river in spate ever faster
Streams oceanward in a headlong rush
So yonder heroic rulers of earth
Are streaming into your flame-licked mouths.

As moths on the wing ever faster will aim
For a burning fire and perish in it,
Just so do these men increasing their speed
Make haste to your mouths to perish in them."[96]

Arjuna cowers before the terrible sight of the god licking his lips in order to devour all the worlds into his flickering mouths. Krishna tells him that he, Krishna, is Time grown old to annihilate the world. He assures Arjuna that he will win the war; his enemies are doomed and will be killed. All this has been preordained; Arjuna is merely the god's instrument. Krishna urges Arjuna to surrender all his acts to him, to seek shelter in him, to be absorbed in him; in return, he will be set free from all sin. So the ultimate message of the *Bhagavadgita* is not related just to war, but to all acts, and its underpinnings are social, philosophical, soteriological, and devotional.

The combination of these powerful arguments resolves Arjuna's terrible dilemma. His doubts are removed, and he picks up his bow and arrows, resolute and prepared to enter battle. The function of the *Bhagavadgita* is to justify the war and to take away the taint and the guilt of killing kin. But it can do this only for the warrior who has internalized its philosophy and who fights accordingly. It is not clear that anyone actually does so in the *Mahabharata,* with the exception, perhaps, of Arjuna. In a righteous war, whose righteousness is certified by none other than a great god who exhorts a warrior to fight, that warrior must not be squeamish about killing, not even about killing his close kin. Whether this applies to ordinary, mundane wars and warriors is another question altogether.

The *Mahabharata* ends with the Pandavas meeting in heaven. But strewn throughout the epic is the idea that heaven is not the final stop and that there is a higher goal. Yudhishthira attains one of the higher

heavens where other great kings of yore such as Harishchandra, Mandhata, Bhagiratha, and Bharata reside. This is because he has followed something greater than the warrior's code—namely, the king's code, which includes virtuous deeds such as giving gifts. But being virtuous and performing royal duties does not lead to the *highest* goal. It is true renunciation that leads to *mokṣa*—liberation from the cycle of rebirth. In spite of all his exertions, Yudhishthira does not achieve this.

While the war begins as a conflict over a kingdom, as it proceeds, the goal expands. It eventually becomes a total war—one whose goal is the annihilation of the enemy. During the war, Bhima drinks Duhshasana's blood after killing him. But Ashvatthama's night massacre of those sleeping in the enemy camp, after the war is more or less over, is perhaps the most chilling event in the epic.[97] Not only does he kill everyone in that camp, but he also releases a weapon that will destroy the wombs of the Pandava women. The goal is the complete annihilation of the enemy's lineage. It is only through Krishna's divine intervention that this catastrophe is averted and prince Parikshit lives. The epic is not as concerned with the general destruction caused by war as it is with the killing of kin. The qualms over this have to be, and are, overcome by the main characters. But this does not explain the extent of Ashvatthaman's carnage. It seems that the Kshatriyas have to be virtually wiped out for a new Kshatriya order to emerge from the ashes of the old.

Ashvatthama's gruesome nocturnal massacre of the Pandava camp is described in a manner in which it appears as an enactment of an animal sacrifice. It is significant that he performs this act after he offers himself to the god Shiva and the latter's destructive energy enters him. There are several places in the *Mahabharata* where war itself is said to be a sacrifice, the battlefield a sacrificial altar, the various weapons the sacrificial implements, the warriors the consecrated performers of the sacrifice, the enemy the offering, and the body of the warrior king the sacrificial post. A detailed explanation of the war-sacrifice (*saṁgrāma-yajña*) is given by Indra to king Ambarisha:

> "Every warrior equipped for battle is ritually consecrated, and when he goes to the front of the army he gains the right to perform the sacrifice of battle—that's a settled conclusion.… The elephants there are the priests, and the horses are the *adhvaryu* priests. The chunks of the enemy's flesh are the offerings, and their blood is the clarified butter. Jackals, vultures, and ravens sit in the ritual assembly and are participants in the solemn rite. … The blood which runs upon the earth from the violence in a battle is its full libation, the rich cow from which all wishes

flow."[98]

What do the frequent analogies between war and sacrifice really mean? There are numerous striking similarities between war and sacrifice. Both involve killing, the following of certain rules or norms, and expiation for lapses. Both have mundane as well as higher aims. The idea of men as victims also perhaps hearkens back to the distant memory of that most supreme of all sacrifices, human sacrifice. The metaphorical description of the war as sacrifice probably also aimed at legitimizing the kind of violence—enormous and targeted against kin, teachers, elders, friends—that it entailed.[99]

As for specific royal sacrifices, the two that stand out in the epic are the *rājasūya* and *aśvamedha,* and both are connected with war. The *rājasūya,* an important sacrifice connected with royal consecration that presented the king as the center of the cyclical process of regeneration of the universe, required huge amounts of wealth and was supposed to be beset with many obstacles. Narada tells Yudhishthira that the *rājasūya* is often followed by a war capable of destroying the earth, and that the portents indicate that his (Yudhishthira's) *rājasūya* would be of this kind. He is right, because Duryodhana's intense jealousy at Yudhishthira's display of his might, wealth, and prestige at this sacrifice ultimately leads directly to the terrible war. The *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) is a great sacrifice signifying political paramountcy and also requires great wealth. It is performed by Yudhishthira soon after the war; it is an opulent event, accompanied by great food and lots of merriment, rather like a grand festival. All the kings of Jambudvipa are present. But the *aśvamedha* is also accompanied by widespread war, even more so to than the *rājasūya.* Arjuna is chosen to accompany the sacrificial horse that is set to roam free for a year, and Yudhishthira tells him to avoid war as far as possible. But there are many battles and Arjuna returns war-weary after winning them all. This particular horse sacrifice seems to be more a purifying and expiatory rite, cleansing Yudhishthira of the sin of killing his kin. So Yudhishthira has incurred sin by fighting the war after all.

After the horse sacrifice is over, a half-golden mongoose enters the scene and sneers at the event.[100] He is actually the sage Jamadagni, transformed into a mongoose due to an ancestors' curse, which would be lifted only when he censured dharma (Yudhishthira is dharma

incarnate). A debate on violence toward animals ensues between the mongoose and the assembled Brahmanas, and the idea of a nonviolent mental sacrifice is introduced. The mongoose points out that the merit accruing from Yudhishthira's *aśvamedha* was less than that of a Brahmana who shares his meager gleanings with a guest. Where does this leave Yudhishthira's grand spectacle? Where does it leave the war and the victory that leads up to it? What was the point of it all?

In a sense, the outcome of the *Mahabharata* war flies in the face of realism. We are told that the Kaurava forces outnumber those of the Pandavas. Yudhishthira has seven armies, Duryodhana has eleven. Nevertheless the Pandavas are invincible because of the sheer presence of Krishna and Arjuna. At the end of the eighteen-day war, thousands have been killed on both sides. There are seven survivors on the Pandava side—the five brothers, Krishna, and Satyaki. Only three warriors survive in the Kaurava camp—Ashvatthama, Kripa, and Kritavarma.

The *Mahabharata* contains an eloquent exhortation to warriors to fight, but it also contains a powerful lament on the consequences of war. The extent of the devastation is matched by the intensity of grief that follows. The victors do not live happily ever after. Yudhishthira secures the throne, but the world continues on its cyclical moral decline. The heroes trudge through life, dispirited. Dhritarashtra mourns the death of his hundred sons. Arjuna is exhausted. Yudhishthira is racked with guilt and sorrow because of his responsibility for killing his kinsmen for the sake of a kingdom. He wants to fast unto death. He wants to go off to the forest and renounce the world. He is constantly counseled and pulled back by the other characters. Familiar arguments are made: He must rule in order to fulfill the duties of a king; renunciation is not part of the Kshatriya way; warriors who die on the battlefield must not be mourned because they go to heaven. Further, Yudhishthira was not responsible for the war and its consequences—it was fate, or it was Time (*kāla*). Yudhishthira was only their instrument.

The postwar narrative of the *Mahabharata* is suffused by the sorrow experienced by the survivors. There is little relief from their incessant pain. The one night of joy they experience is when Vyasa, using his divine powers, unites the living with the dead, by creating a vision of the dead heroes. The latter rise out of the waters of the Ganga River, and this reunion is the only brief episode of happiness that the victors experience. It is only after death that the protagonists achieve peace of mind. The war was necessary, but it does not lead to happiness.

So the *Mahabharata* can also be read as a powerful indictment of war. The most concentrated lament is contained in the Stri Parva. In this book, there is universal lament at the death of loved ones; bitter

accusations of responsibility; acknowledgments of guilt; and attempts at consolation and conciliation. Grief, guilt, and remorse are on display. There is a regular blame game as Dhritarashtra, Yudhishthira, Gandhari, Duryodhana, Krishna, and fate are variously held responsible for the disaster. Ultimately, anger makes way for grief and for an acceptance of what has come to pass.

The intensity of anger and grief are reflected most of all in the description of the emotions of women. And here, the *Mahabharata* eloquently presents a chilling and powerful women's perspective—especially that of mothers and widows—on the carnage of war:

> Along the bank of the Gaṅgā … Yudhishthira beheld women in throngs, shrieking like stricken ospreys. At once they surrounded the king in their thousands, weeping, waving their arms aloft in their distress, speaking without caring whether their words were soft or harsh. "How can the king know dharma and yet show such cruelty that he slew fathers, brothers, elders, sons and friends?"[101]

The queen Gandhari has lost all one hundred of her sons, and Yudhishthira is rightly afraid of her anger. He trembles as he approaches her with folded hands, admitting his culpability:

> "Lady, I am Yudhishthira, the cruel slayer of your sons. I deserve to be cursed, for I am to blame for this devastation of the earth. Curse me! For I am a friend-betraying fool, and having slain such friends, I have no use for life, or wealth, or kingdom."[102]

A tiny sliver of her furious gaze from the corner of her blindfold burns the tips of Yudhishthira's fingernails. Gandhari describes her hundred dead sons and curses Krishna for contributing to their death—he will meet a violent death thirty-six years hence at the hands of his own kin.

Unaccustomed to the dreadful spectacle of war, the women are dazed as they stumble over the battlefield, muddy with flesh and blood:

> The earth itself seems overspread with fallen hands and other

> limbs, mingled in heaps. The blameless women see dreadful headless bodies and bodiless heads, and unaccustomed to such sights, they are struck senseless. Staring distractedly, they join a head to a body, failing in their misery to see that it is another's and does not belong there; full of woe, they also join up arms and thighs and feet that have been separated again and again.[103]

Who is to blame for the slaughter? This is a question that is raised repeatedly, including in a conversation between Sanjaya and Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya is the plain-speaking caustic war reporter, who can see what is happening on the battlefield due to the divine vision granted to him, and he narrates all the events to the blind king. Every now and then, Dhritarasthra moans that this is all because of fate, and Sanjaya retorts that it is actually entirely his, Dhritarashtra's, fault. But the larger perspective of the epic is that things happen because they are destined, and war and happiness are incompatible.

War in the *Ramayana*

The *Mahabharata* war is fought for the sake of a kingdom. In the *Ramayana,* none of the princes hankers for the throne. Rama fights the king of Lanka to regain his beloved abducted wife, Sita, and Ravana is willing to go to war to retain her.[104] For Rama, it is also a matter of love and honor. The cruel words he speaks to his wife after she is brought before him indicate that the second is more important to him:

> "Let it be understood that it was not on your account that I undertook the effort of this war, now brought to completion through the valour of my allies. Instead, I did all this in order to protect my reputation and in every way to wipe clean the insult and disgrace to my illustrious lineage."[105]

But there is more to the war against Ravana, although Rama himself does not yet know this. Like the *Mahabharata* war, this one is another round of the age-old conflict between the gods and demons. Rama is a god, born as a man. His birth is part of a divine plan—to kill the arrogant demon Ravana, enemy of the gods, who has created terror by obstructing the activities of the gods, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, Brahmanas, and sages. Rama and his three brothers are parts of the god Vishnu. Rama's helpers, the *vānaras* (who have the form of monkeys), are actually the sons of various gods and have been created with the specific task of defeating Ravana. Through his austerities, Ravana had obtained a boon from the god Brahma that he could not be killed by the gods, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, or *dānavas* (a type of demon). Being contemptuous of humans, he did not ask for invulnerability from humans. As in the *Mahabharata,* in this epic too, there are martial Brahmanas such as Vishvamitra and Parashurama. But war is generally associated with the Kshatriyas, and the epic has much to say about their dharma. War in the *Ramayana* is a dramatic episode involving copious killing. And yet it does not seem as brutal, as laden with anguish and despair, as it does in the *Mahabharata.*

As in the *Mahabharata,* so in the *Ramayana,* there is an awareness that given the nature of the adversary, peace will not be possible. Nevertheless there are attempts to maintain peace, and these come from Ravana's camp. When Ravana seeks the counsel of his ministers,

they tell him that Rama can be easily defeated. But Ravana's brother Vibhishana warns against rushing into war and suggests that the other expedients should be tried first:

> "The learned have prescribed as appropriate the use of force [*vikrama*] only on those occasions where one's object cannot be achieved by means of the other three stratagems [*upāyas*], dear brother. And, dear brother, the use of force, even when made judiciously and in accordance with the proper injunctions, succeeds only against those who are off guard, preoccupied, or stricken by misfortune. How then can you all hope to assail someone who is vigilant, intent upon victory, firm in his strength, the master of his anger, and utterly unassailable?"[106]

Vibhishana urges his brother to return Sita and establish peace. Ravana, however, doubts his motives and ruminates on the dangers posed by close kin. Ravana's grand-uncle Malyavan recognizes the portents of doom and urges Ravana to make an alliance with Rama and establish peace, using pragmatic as well as moral arguments: A learned king who follows sound policy should make peace or war at the appropriate times; one who is weaker than or equal in strength to the enemy should make peace; one should wage war only if one is stronger than the enemy, and even then, one should never underestimate him. Dharma will overcome *adharma.* The omens portend the destruction of the demons. Rama cannot be an ordinary mortal—he must be a form of Vishnu.[107] Another adviser, Mahodara, urges the use of deception rather than war. Even as Rama's army prepares to cross the ocean, Ravana's ministers urge him to return Sita and make peace; they describe to him the power of the monkeys and the qualities of Rama and Lakshmana. But Ravana chastises them for praising his enemies. Ravana's wives, mother, and senior-most advisor, Aviddha, also urge him to give Sita up, but to no avail. Ravana is impelled by fate; his anger, stubbornness, and refusal to listen to wise counsel stand out in his assertion that he will break, but never bend. As in the *Mahabharata,* here, too, there is a mission sent to the enemy: Angada is sent to Lanka with a message from Rama, but it is a message not of peace but of war.

There are several similarities in the *Ramayana*'s and *Mahabharata*'s descriptions of the fourfold army, the numerous one-to-one fights, the use of conventional and celestial weapons, the noise of war, and the dust raised by the soldiers blocking out the sun. But there is also a world of difference between the two events. The *Mahabharata* war takes place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The war against Ravana takes place far away from Kosala, on the outskirts of, and eventually within, Lanka. It is a siege. As Rama's army achieves successes, the monkeys move into the city and set it ablaze. The noncombatant citizenry is devastated as a result. The epic oscillates between the two sides, giving us a picture of what was happening in both camps.

Unlike the *Mahabharata,* where the armies return day after day to thrash each other on the same battlefield, the central war of the *Ramayana* involves the protagonist's army, largely consisting of monkeys, moving across the ocean. Rama and Lakshmana are the only two humans in this army. Ayodhya has an army. Its soldiers and the best horses and elephants live in the city, rendering it secure. Bharata takes a massive entourage, including the fourfold army, with him when he goes to the forest to bring his brother Rama back. But the army of Ayodhya does not fight with its exiled prince in the war against Lanka. The heroes of the *Mahabharata* ride majestically out to the battlefield on splendid chariots, with their allies in tow. In contrast, although they are great chariot warriors (*mahārathī*s), Rama and Lakshmana leave for Lanka on the shoulders of the monkeys Hanuman and Angada, their army consisting almost entirely of boisterous monkeys. As mentioned earlier, the *vānara*s are no ordinary monkeys. As the spy Shuka reports to Ravana:

> "Those monkeys—resembling great rutting elephants, banyan trees along the Ganges, or *sāla* trees in the Himalayas—whom you see taking up their positions are powerful and impossible to withstand, your majesty. They can take on any form at will, and they are like the *daitya*s and the *dānava*s [demons]. Their valour is that of the gods in battle. There are tens of billions of them—times nine, times five, and times seven, and there are quadrillions and septillions more."[108]

Although the monkeys can change their form, they restrict themselves to maintaining their monkey form through the battle, only changing their size on occasion to get out of a sticky situation. When they march against the enemy, they do so in millions. They fight on foot. They never tire and can move with ease in different terrains, on mountains, in forests, and through water. The army has several leaders and a commander in chief, Sugriva. There are generals who organize their troops in vaguely described battle formations. The routine positioning of troops and the ensuring of food and water supplies are mentioned. The army marches day and night with no stops. Rama and Lakshmana use bows and arrows, but the *vānaras* use their fists, nails, and feet. Apart from his own hands, Hanuman uses trees and mountains as weapons; and he can and does transport entire mountains. The valor of the monkey soldiers is underlined by repeated descriptions of their great feats of strength. They are often described as bulls, lions, tigers, and elephants among monkeys. They occasionally indulge in pranks. But apart from their strength, the most important aspect of the monkeys is their complete devotion to Rama—they are ready to die for him.

Lanka is clearly an island, and Indian tradition identifies it with modern Sri Lanka. The Palk Strait, which separates the modern Indian state of Tamil Nadu from the Mannar district of northern Sri Lanka, is not a huge mass of water on the map of South Asia. But in the *Ramayana,* this strip of water is described as a great and terrible ocean (*mahodadhi*), inhabited by fierce animals. The monkeys gaze at this ocean with despair:

> For it was dreadful with its fierce sharks and crocodiles. And now, as the day waned and the night came on, the ocean, Varuṇa's [the god of the ocean's] lair, agitated at the rising of the moon, was covered with reflections of its orb. It was swarming with huge crocodiles as powerful as fierce gales and with whales and whale sharks. It was teeming, it appeared, with serpents, their coils flashing. It swarmed with huge creatures and was studded with all sorts of rocks. The abode of the *asuras*, it was fathomless, unapproachable, and impossible to cross.[109]

The extension of Rama's conquest to the southernmost tip of the subcontinent, was probably considered necessary to emphasize his

extensive martial achievements.

The ingenious way in which Rama crosses this ocean, the monkeys constructing a bridge using boulders and trees, is described as a tremendous feat. The mastermind is Nala, who is chief engineer of the monkeys and the son of Vishvakarman, the divine architect and builder. The celestial beings and sages gather and hover to witness it:

> All beings gazed upon that inconceivable, seemingly impossible, and hair-raising marvel: the building of a bridge over the ocean.[110]

The importance of the ocean (*sāgara, samudra*) in the *Ramayana* is not restricted to the fact that water separates Rama from Lanka. The epic has the generic idea of the oceans of the four quarters, as well as the idea of the seven seas. There is also much oceanic imagery. Armies are compared with the ocean in their vastness as they surge forward. Characters enter into an ocean of terror; their anger rises like the ocean at high tide. In Lanka, Sita is like a tiny boat on the ocean, tossed about by stormy winds. Rama and Sita are plunged into the ocean of grief due to their separation. The political symbolism of water comes out in strong measure when during his *abhiṣeka,* Rama is consecrated with water from the four oceans and five hundred rivers. Even though he is not described as a *cakravartin,* it is clear that he is lord of the whole earth.

Unlike the *vānara* soldiers, who move about on foot, Ravana has a regular fourfold army. There are great generals, some of them princes, others sons of ministers. They ride out on magnificent chariots, horses, or elephants, wearing splendid ornaments, armor, and weaponry. Ravana's magnificent chariot, given to him by Brahma, is yoked to a thousand donkeys. Unlike the rudimentary weaponry used by their adversaries, the demons (often referred to as *niśācara*s, night-roamers) have sophisticated weapons:

> With its terrifying horses, chariots, and elephants, and crowded with various types of foot soldiers, the fearsome *rākṣasa* [demon] army emerged into view, its lances, maces, swords, darts, iron cudgels and bows glittering. Its valour and prowess were terrifying. Its darts were flashing and it resounded with hundreds of little bells. The soldiers, their arms covered with golden

> ornaments, swung their battle-axes about and whirled their mighty weapons. They had fixed their arrows to their bows. They perfumed the strong breeze with their fragrances, floral wreaths, and the honey-wine of their stirrup-cups. Filled with mighty warriors and rumbling like a great storm cloud, the army was truly fearsome.[111]

Both sides fight ferociously, but there is a difference in the quality of their ferocity. We are told that Ravana's brother Kumbhakarna is a cannibal. There is one important defector from Ravana's side—his younger brother Vibhishana, who, before the war begins, goes over to Rama's side, ostensibly because although a demon, he shares the better nature of virtuous men, but also no doubt because of self-interest. Rama consecrates him as king of Lanka when he arrives in his camp, and after the end of the war, it is Vibhishana who takes over the reins of power on the island. Vibhishana plays an important role in the war, giving crucial advice and lifting the sagging morale of the monkey army on several occasions.

The importance of military intelligence is recognized by both sides. Hanuman is sent to Lanka to ascertain the details of the enemy's defenses and troop deployment. The demons unsuccessfully use spies to try to ascertain what is happening in the enemy camp. They regularly use magic and illusion. They also resort to sacrifices and recite powerful mantras over the garlands of their soldiers. Ravana's son, Indrajit, is especially known for performing sacrifices and derives great power from them. He performs a victory rite in a temple dedicated to the fierce goddess Nikumbhila, where he pours oblations of blood. He can make himself invisible; his arrows turn into snakes and bind Rama and Lakshmana. He creates an illusory Sita and kills her in front of the monkeys to demoralize them. This is psychological warfare par excellence, including deception, feigning, and spreading disinformation.

Both sides use a battery of celestial weapons associated with various gods. The celestial weapons sometimes have physical form; at other times they are weapons charged with mantras, and sometimes they are just mantras. There are frequent descriptions—some brief, some long—of the great weapons. They are often obtained through the performance of great austerities. Rama has to purify himself before receiving the great *bala* and *atibala* mantras, which will protect and

assist him in war. At the urging of the gods, Vishvamitra then bestows on Rama the celestial weapons that he had acquired through his performance of austerities. But these weapons, offspring of the god Prajapati, can also assume unusual forms. After Vishvamitra purifies himself, and as he bestows the mantras on Rama while facing east, the weapons materialize in front of Rama in human form. They greet him respectfully and tell him that they are his to command. Rama caresses their hands and tells them to come to him when summoned. Weapons sometimes take the initiative away from those who wield them. Realizing that Lakshmana is invincible, a spear hurled toward him returns to Ravana's chariot. Ravana is ultimately killed when Rama pierces his chest with the irresistible weapon of Brahma (*brahmāstra*).

The description of the great battle frequently alludes to the din and dust of war. The sound of the twanging of Rama's bow fills the skies. There is the noise of the demons' stamping feet, the beating of drums, the conches, the jangling of bells, cries, wails, but above all, the roars of the furious warriors as they fight to the finish. The terrible noise makes animals and birds flee in fear. Unlike in the *Mahabharata,* in the *Ramayana,* the fighting continues day and night. In the noise and confusion, in the chaos created by the clouds of dust, both sides attack their own. The violent demons devour their monkey adversaries. It is a tremendous melee of demons, monkeys, horses, and elephants; there are only two men in this war—Rama and Lakshmana. Rama fights on foot, until Indra sends down his chariot and charioteer Matali for him to face Ravana who is riding on a chariot. There is much one-to-one combat, and the morale of the two sides waxes and wanes according to the outcome of these encounters. When on several occasions the *vānara*s get dejected and are on the verge of fleeing, Vibhishana urges them to rally and fight.

There is much emotion and drama during the battle and many mighty oaths are made. The protagonists and their enemies oscillate between intense anger and despair. Ravana laments as his generals, brothers, and sons are killed. Lakshmana rails bitterly against dharma. At one point, when he thinks Laksmana has been killed, Rama gives way to a despair that reminds us of Arjuna on the eve of the war:

> "For my valour itself seems to hang its head in shame, while my bow seems to slip from my grasp. My arrows drop away, and my sight is dimmed with tears. Dreadful thoughts grow in my mind,

> and I wish now only for death.… Seeing my brother Lakshmana struck down in the dust of the battlefield, I have no further use for battle, for my life, or even for Sita herself."[112]

The detailed war–sacrifice analogies found in the *Mahabharata* are absent in the *Ramayana,* but there are plenty of gory descriptions of the fighting and the battlefield—the thousands of corpses of monkeys and demons, showers of arrows, headless corpses leaping about, warriors with their bodies rent or beaten to pulp, limbs smeared with blood, smashed chariots, dead war-horses and elephants, and jackals and vultures roaming about among the dead. Warriors rush toward their death like moths toward a flame. The destruction caused by war is compared to that of a forest fire. The analogy of the river is also used to describe the battlefield:

> Indeed the battleground resembled a river. Masses of slain heroes formed its banks, and shattered weapons, its great trees. Torrents of blood made up its broad waters, and the ocean to which it flowed was Yama [the god of death]. Livers and spleens made up its deep mud, scattered entrails its waterweeds. Severed heads and trunks made up its fish, pieces of limbs its grass. It was crowded with vultures in place of flocks of *haṁsa*s [swans], and it was swarming with adjutant storks instead of *sārasa* cranes. It was covered with fat in place of foam, and the cries of the wounded took the place of its gurgling. It was not to be forded by the faint of heart.[113]

Decapitation is favored as a definitive act. Rama decapitates the demons Khara and Trishiras, Indrajit's head is severed by Lakshmana, Sugriva decapitates Mahodara. The emphasis on decapitation of the enemy forms the essential background for the most important and most difficult decapitation of all: the multiple decapitation of the ten-headed Ravana by Rama at the grand finale of the battle. As soon as Rama's arrows slice off one head, another head emerges in its place. But Ravana is ultimately killed not by decapitation but by Rama piercing his heart with Brahma's arrow.

At the same time, there is an aestheticization of war and allusion to the beauty of war wounds. The bodies of warriors are described as strewn on the battlefield like the *kusha* grass on the sacrificial altar.

The imagery in the *Ramayana* focuses obsessively on blood. As he lies on the bed of arrows, drenched in his own blood, Lakshmana looks "like the sun, bringer of light, as it sets."[114] The bodies of bloody warriors are very often compared with the *kimshuka* tree, with its red flowers.

> Drenched with blood in battle, Lakshmana's elder brother [Rama] looked like a great *kiṁśuka* tree in full bloom in the forest.[115]

Another feature of the *Ramayana*'s treatment of war is that the great heroes on occasion are grievously wounded but are healed miraculously. At one time, the fallen Lakshmana is revived by the touch of the divine bird, *garuḍa*. At another time, Rama and Lakshmana are revived by herbs from the mountain that Hanuman uproots and brings to the battlefield. The third time, Lakshmana is revived by Hanuman, who again brings the herb-laden mountain.

The war is very much a male domain, but a powerful feminine shadow hangs over it throughout—that of Sita. It has been suggested that the insertion of Sita's presence at critical junctures in the description of the war marks significant feminine ruptures in the otherwise dominantly masculine narrative of the epic that emphasizes male prowess and male bonding.[116] War is punctuated by love—by the desperate expressions of Rama and Sita's intense love for each other. After the war, Rama's cruel rejection of Sita adds great pathos to the story.

The demons are generally associated with treacherous fighting and Rama's side with righteousness. But Ravana adheres to the warrior's code of honor not just once, but on several critical occasions. And Rama transgresses the warrior's code (an episode that takes place well before the war with Ravana) when he shoots the *vānara* Vali in the back while the latter is fighting Sugriva. Vali berates Rama for transgressing dharma, and Rama gives him a battery of reasons in his own defense, covering all bases.[117] The first reason is Vali's adulterous act of sleeping with his younger brother Sugriva's wife. The second is that Rama was obliged to help Sugriva by any means because the latter was his friend. The third is that Vali was a mere animal, ignorant of matters related to dharma. Humans, including sage-like kings, hunted, captured, and killed animals even while their backs

were turned. Dharma is complex, difficult to comprehend. Kings are gods on earth and the source of dharma. Vali accepts that Rama is right and that he himself has violated dharma. He apologizes for his error and goes to heaven due to Rama's blessings.

We have noted the powerful lament of the women after the *Mahabharata* war. In the *Ramayana* too, we see a lament, but only that of the women of the losing side, as they recapitulate the events that have transpired, blame Ravana for his defeat, grieve for the dead, and brood about their own uncertain future.[118] Ravana's senior wife, Mandodari, laments, recalling his past great deeds, reflecting on the reasons for his defeat (lust and anger), Rama's victory, and her own sorrow.[119]

There is no doubt about which side is associated with dharma. At one point, when the war is going badly for them, Lakshmana gives a strong critique of dharma, saying that it worthless and powerless, that wealth (*artha*) is much greater and is the foundation of happiness and dharma.[120] This critique goes unrefuted at this point of time, but it does not represent the dominant view of the *Ramayana.* Rama's side suffers reverses and despair at various points. The uncertainties of war are alluded to. And yet, because this is a righteous war, another round of a larger cosmic game, there is no real doubt about the outcome: The good guys have to win. Dharma always triumphs over *adharma.*

Like the heroes of the *Mahabharata,* Rama does not experience happiness after his victory. He sacrifices his beloved wife in order to remain untainted by public scandal. But his is not a quest for personal happiness anyway. He is a preeminent practitioner of dharma as duty. An important aspect of his character that is repeatedly emphasized is his compassion.

This compassion is not initially on display. When they go to the forest, Rama and Lakshmana load lots of weapons and armor onto their chariot. They strap their armor over their ascetics' bark robes (a bit of a contradiction!). Sita is uncomfortable seeing this. She affectionately talks to Rama about the need to avoid the vices of lying, sex with another man's wife, and violence (*raudratā*). While she is confident that Rama can never be guilty of the first two, she senses that he could be prone to the third. She worries that handling weapons could lead to unprovoked violence. The way of the weapons and that of the forest, the way of the Kshatriya and that of the ascetics are diametrically opposed. She hopes that Rama will never unnecessarily attack the demons just because he carries a weapon. Rama replies that he has to be armed at all times because he has to protect the sages. Even in the forest, a Kshatriya has to fulfil his duty.[121]

But by and large, the epic characterizes Rama as a compassionate warrior, one who is compassionate even toward his enemies. In the course of a conversation on how to treat the demon Vibhishana, who has defected to their side, he approvingly cites the verses of Kandu, son of the sage Kanva, as being righteous, praiseworthy, and conducive to the attainment of heaven:

> "For the sake of compassion, scorcher of your foes, one ought never slay a poor wretch who has come for refuge, begging for protection with his hands cupped in reverence, even should he be one's enemy. Even at the cost of his own life, a magnanimous person should save an enemy who has come for refuge from his enemies, whether he be abject or arrogant."[122]

Later, Rama restrains Lakshmana when the latter announces that he will kill all the demons:

> "You must not slaughter all the *rākṣasas* of the earth on account of a single one.… Therefore, mighty warrior, let us strive to slay him [Ravana] alone."[123]

This is very different from the idea of total war in the *Mahabharata*.

Sita, too, is compassionate. She does not allow Hanuman to kill the demonesses who had been her companions during her incarceration (some of them had actually been kind to her). She argues that they were just following their nature and Ravana's orders. Her misfortunes in this life were the result of fate and misdeeds performed in previous lives. A noble person must react with compassion (*kāruṇya*) in every situation, no matter what the provocation and regardless of the adversary's conduct.[124]

Rama's compassion stands in great contrast to Ravana's cruel nature. This makes his magnanimity in victory even more stark. The noble Rama urges the reluctant Vibhishana to perform Ravana's funerary rites. He lists Ravana's negative qualities—his lies, deceit, cruelty, and unrighteousness. But he also points to his good qualities.

> "Granted, the night-roaming *rākṣasa* was given to unrighteousness and untruthfulness. Nonetheless, he was always a powerful and energetic hero in battle. Rāvaṇa, who made the worlds cry out, was a great hero, endowed with might. One never heard that the gods, led by Indra of the hundred sacrifices, ever defeated him. But hostilities cease with death. Our purpose has been accomplished. You may now perform his funeral rites, *for as he was to you, so he is to me.*" (Emphasis added)[125]

When Indra tells Rama to ask for anything, he asks that all the *vānaras* who had died fighting for him should be restored to life, that they should never lack for the choicest roots and fruits, even out of season, and that the places where they lived should always have rivers with clear water. The god is happy to grant this boon.

Rama's compassion (*kāruṇya, ānṛśaṁsya*) in these episodes is an extension of his essential compassion for all.[126] And it is not just a personality trait. It is connected with his divinity and the theological aspect of the *Ramayana*. The fact that he is the object of *bhakti* and the refuge of all beings (*śaraṇya śaraṇa*) is mentioned frequently. But the Yuddhakanda ends with Rama's lack of compassion for Sita, an

episode that was to haunt the great epic hero for centuries, and continues to do so even today.

War in the Political Treatises

To what extent did the epic perspectives on war match those of the political treatises? Kautilya's discussion of interstate policy presumes a context of multiple warring states, vying for political supremacy. However, the text emphasizes the imperial ideals and ambitions of the *vijigīṣu*—the king desirous of victory—who aims to conquer the whole earth. War is considered natural, and allies and enemies are determined by their location vis-à-vis the *vijigīṣu* and each other, although this pattern can easily be upset.[127]

Kautilya connects the king with the other elements of the state. He extends and applies the ideas of statecraft and political economy to the goals of war, treaties, and interstate relations. Some of these ideas are present in the epics, especially the *Mahabharata,* but Kautilya gives a more focused, detailed, and connected account of statecraft and interstate relations. The *vijigīṣu* of the *Arthashastra* is not just an ambitious king who wants to achieve military success; he is a king endowed with positive personal qualities, the constituents of whose state are in excellent condition, and who rules through the means of good policy.[128]

THE CIRCLE OF KINGS

Central to Kautilya's discussion of interstate relations is the theory of "the circle of kings" (*rāja-maṇḍala*). He gives two alternative descriptions of this circle. In the first description, the circle consists of twelve basic units—the *vijigīṣu, ari* (enemy), *mitra* (ally), *arimitra* (enemy's ally), *mitramitra* (ally's ally), *arimitramitra* (enemy's ally's ally), *pārṣṇigrāha* (enemy in the rear), *ākranda* (ally in the rear), *pārṣṇigrāhāsāra* (*pārṣṇigrāha*'s ally), and *ākrandāsāra* (*ākranda*'s ally), who are all arranged one behind the other; the last two are the *madhyama* (whose territory lies between that of the *vijigīṣu* and the *ari* and who is stronger than both) and *udāsīna* (the neutral king, whose territory lies outside the sphere of the *ari, vijigīṣu,* and *madhyama* and who is stronger than they).[129] If we consider these twelve kings (*rāja-prakṛtis*) along with the six constituent elements of each of their units (the seven *prakṛtis* minus the ally, referred to in *AS* 6.2.28 as the *dravya-prakṛtis*), this makes a total of $12 \times 6 = 72$ units in the circle of kings. The second way of describing the circle of kings visualizes four basic circles—those of the *vijigīṣu, ari, madhyama,* and *udāsīna.*

Each of these includes the king in question, his *mitra,* and *mitramitra* (making a total of three), and six *dravya-prakṛtis*. In this calculation, each circle consists of eighteen elements (3 × 6 = 18); and the total number of elements in the four circles taken together (18 × 4) gives us again a total of seventy-two elements in the *rāja-maṇḍala.*[130]

And yet, after introducing and explaining the *rāja-maṇḍala,* Kautilya immediately undermines it, making it apparent that the arrangement is neither a fixed nor a stable formation. Within the categories of enemy and ally, he distinguishes between those that are natural, by birth, and temporary.[131] Further, allies cannot always be depended on for support; the *vijigīṣu* and enemy can come together to attack another enemy; and in certain situations a king may wish success to the enemy.[132] This indicates that geographical location and relative strength are not the only determining factors in the circle of kings. The *rāja-maṇḍala* theory is obviously a theoretical construct based on some basic insights into interstate relations. Its goal is to overcome and destroy the circle and reduce it to one element—the *vijigīṣu* himself. According to Kautilya, the leader should try to stretch himself out as the hub in the circle—that is, become the center of a galaxy of kings. Ultimately, the *vijigīṣu* has to over-reach (*atisaṁdhā*) not only the enemies, but all the elements in the circle.

The theory of the circle of kings is connected with that of the six measures (*guṇas*, literally "excellences") of interstate policy and the four expedients (*upāyas*). The six measures (*ṣāḍguṇya*), discussed in Book 7, are: peace / treaty (*sandhi*), war / initiating hostilities (*vigraha*), staying quiet (*āsana*), initiating a military march (*yāna*), seeking shelter (*saṁśraya*), and the dual policy of peace or treaty with one king and war against another (*dvaidhibhāva*).[133] The general policy recommended is that the king should make peace with the equal and the stronger king, and should make war against the weaker one. But Kautilya makes several exceptions to this rule—for instance, when the stronger king does not want peace; if the weaker one stays submissive in all respects; if the stronger king's subjects are greedy, impoverished, or rebellious; or if although stronger, a king's calamity (*vyasana*) is greater than that of the enemy. Policy options also depend on the relative *guṇas* and *vyasanas* of the various elements of the circle. Once again, Kautilya connects the internal constitution of a state with its outward policy.

The four expedients (*upāyas*) are an important part of both governance and the conduct of relations with other states. These are

pacification (*sāma*), giving gifts *(dāna*), force (*daṇḍa*), and creating dissension (*bheda*). All these need to be used astutely, depending on the situation. Of these, in the case of dealing with a defeated king, Kautilya describes conciliation as the best policy, as it will ensure that he will remain obedient to the *vijigīṣu*'s sons and grandsons. In fact, he warns against the use of excessive force against defeated kings (killing or imprisoning them and coveting their land, property, sons, or wives), and says that in such a situation, the circle of kings becomes frightened and rises to destroy the *vijigīṣu* and can take his kingdom or his life.[134]

Although in most places in the *Arthashastra, sāmanta* seems to mean a neighboring king, there are a few places where the term may have tinges of its later sense of a subordinate ruler. In discussing the policy toward defeated kings, Kautilya is in favor of reinstating them in a relationship of subordination rather than grabbing their territory. What is even more significant is that his definition of gain in the context of making treaties focuses on resources.[135] In line with the perspective of a treatise on *artha,* he also puts forward the idea of treaties for *economic* collaboration, not only for military collaboration, with other states. Similarly, the conduct of interstate relations requires the movement of payment and receipts with allies and enemies, and Kautilya recommends that records of these transactions be maintained.[136]

It has been suggested that Kautilya (or "Hindu political thought,") does not distinguish between internal and external affairs.[137] It should by now be more than apparent that while the *Arthashastra* divides its subject matter into internal administration and the conduct of interstate relations—the former being dealt with in Books 1–5 and the latter in Books 6–13 as well as in Book 14—it recognizes the distinction between the two but constantly reiterates the connections. As is the case with the strength of the state, Kautilya's triumph lies in explaining what lies beneath the surface of military victory and defeat, that military success has to be based on effective governance, and that it has to be accompanied by various strategies of weakening the enemy state. The other important connection that Kautilya makes is between the treasury and the army: He asserts that the army (*daṇḍa*) is rooted in the treasury (*kośa*) and therefore the calamity of the latter is more serious than that of the former. But while highlighting the army's dependence on the treasury, he also brings out the close, reciprocal relationship between the two: The army is the

means of acquiring and protecting the treasury; and the treasury is the means of augmenting and protecting itself and the army.[138]

THE ARMY

The *Arthashastra* talks about a fourfold army (*caturaṅga-bala*) consisting of infantry, cavalry, a chariot wing, and an elephant corps. It also has a detailed discussion of the battle arrays (*vyūhas*), introducing new elements of classification that are not known in the *Mahabharata.*[139] In contrast to epic warfare, which is dominated by warriors on chariots, the *Arthashastra* constantly emphasizes the importance of the elephant corps. Kautilya does not mention a navy, but Megasthenes does. Although their description of army administration is quite different, one thing that is common to both accounts is a highly bureaucratized military administration. Strabo reports a royal monopoly on the ownership of horses and elephants and also mentions armorers and shipbuilders employed for wages by the state.

According to Kautilya, the qualities of an ideal army include it being inherited from the father and grandfather, constant, obedient, loyal, resolute, with contented families, experienced and skilled in the knowledge of warfare and weaponry. He also states that the ideal army should consist mostly of Kshatriyas.[140] Of armies consisting of Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra soldiers, Kautilya cites the experts as asserting that each earlier one is better on account of spirit (*tejas*). Kautilya strongly disagrees with this view.[141] He asserts that a Brahmana army is not a good idea because the enemy may win Brahmana troops over by prostrating themselves before them. A Kshatriya army, trained in the art of weapons, is better than a Brahmana one. So is a powerful Vaishya or Shudra army. The categorical rejection of the idea of a Brahmana army is significant and suggests that Kautilya was in favor of Brahmanas sticking to their vocation and not being involved in warfare. But equally interesting is his acceptance of the idea of a Vaishya or a Shudra army, *provided that it is strong.* Once again, in the *Arthashastra,* pragmatism triumphs over tradition.

Attending to military matters occurs several times in the daily time-table Kautilya devises for the king. This divides the latter's day and night into eight parts each. The king's day should start with listening to steps being taken for defense and accounts of income and expenditure. During the seventh part of the day, he should review his

elephants, horses, chariots, and soldiers. During the eighth part of the day, he should discuss military plans with the commander in chief.[142]

Kautilya talks about six types of troops (*bala*)—hereditary (*maula*), hired (*bhṛta*), banded (*śreṇi*), ally's (*mitra*), alien (*amitra*), and forest (*āṭavika*) troops. This is a hierarchy: The hereditary troops are considered the best and forest troops the worst. Kautilya explains that the type of troops that should be used in a campaign also depends on the circumstances. The term *śreṇī-bala* is especially interesting and has been interpreted in two ways—as a permanent armed militia maintained by a guild; or as a guild, band, or corporate organization of warriors. The latter is more likely. The term can be understood as referring to bands of soldiers under their leaders (*mukhyas*).[143] Kautilya lists the advantages of the *śreṇī-bala* as follows: They are native to the country; united in common purpose; and have the same rivalry, resentment, success, and gain as the king. Other experts held that the band is impossible to suppress because of its large numbers and because of the harassment it inflicts through robbery and forcible seizure; and because its chief harasses by favoring and destroying undertakings. However, Kautilya asserts that the bands themselves are easy to control because of their common character and vices, and can be dealt with by winning over a segment or the chief. But the chief of the band, being arrogant, causes harassment by destroying the lives and property of others.[144] Forest troops are variously bracketed with alien, treasonable, and barbarian (*mleccha*) troops. Forest and alien troops are useful in "crooked warfare" (discussed further on). Although they can be used when required, they are described as dangerous, as their object is plunder.

Kautilya lays down the salaries of military officers and soldiers. The commander in chief (*senāpati*) is in the highest income bracket (48,000 *paṇas*), along with high-ranking priests, officials, and the king's kin.[145] The reason given for giving them high salaries is so that they are not susceptible to instigation or revolt. The ordinary foot soldier (*āyudhīya*) trained in the arts (*śilpa*) of war should get 500 *paṇas* (equivalent to the salaries of accountants and clerks).[146] The use of the term *śilpa* (craft) for the military arts is significant. In another place, Kautilya recommends that soldiers be paid in food as well as wages.[147] The families of soldiers who die on duty must be maintained and cared for. Soldiers should be subjected to tests of loyalty, and handing over soldiers is part of military negotiation.

The construction of the fortress, weapons and armor, chariots,

horse, elephants, the armory and the duties of the officer in charge of the armory (*āyudhāgārādhyakṣa*) are discussed in detail by Kautilya.[148] So are the chain of command, battle arrays, weapons, siege tactics, and military strategies and maneuvers. Kautilya includes weapons, armor, and chariots in the list of articles that are not to be exported, implying that such valuable commodities have to be conserved to meet the needs of the state.

The *skandhāvāra* of the *Arthashastra* is no simple army camp.[149] It includes gates, moat, ramparts, the king's quarters, audience hall, and enclosures for different types of troops and officials. It has physicians, astrologers, Brahmanas, bards, priests, ministers, machine-makers, and carpenters. On the eve of battle, the king should perform rituals, and offerings should be made into the fire with Atharvan mantras. Brahmanas should recite blessings invoking victory and heaven for the king. The activity of the king about to march includes instigating revolts in enemy territory and guarding against revolts in the *vijigīṣu*'s own ranks. Military operations are rarely presented as solo operations. The king frequently marches along with confederates and allied troops. There is also the idea of a volunteer army coming from many regions. The army entourage includes wives, who should march along with the king in the center of the array. Women in charge of food and drink should be positioned in the rear. The king should sit on an elephant or a chariot, guarded by cavalry. A decoy king can be placed at the head of the array.

Kautilya talks about the harassment and oppression (*pīḍana*) of people as a result of warfare.[150] Disagreeing with the other experts, he says that the harassment inflicted on the people by another's army is worse than that inflicted by one's own army. This is because harassment by one's own army can be avoided by winning over or destroying the leaders among the principal officers, and such harassment afflicts only a part of the land. On the other hand, the harassment by the enemy's army afflicts the entire land, ruins it through plunder, killing, burning, destroying, and carrying people off. There is also mention of the destruction of the enemy's crops in the course of the march (this runs counter to the assertion in the Greek accounts that farmers were untouched during war).[151]

Plunder (*vilopa*) is a routine aspect of Kautilyan warfare. The shares of plunder between confederates and others who march together are discussed.[152] The share can be either fixed (if the gain is certain) or a proportion (if the gains are uncertain). The plunder shares also

depend on the number of troops, the effort, the amount obtained by each, or the amount loaned for the expedition.

On the issue of how the subjects of an enemy king should be treated during the siege of the enemy's fort, Kautilya says that the *vijigīṣu* should grant safety to the settled countryside and should pacify those who have risen but not gone away by bestowing favors (*anugraha*) and exemptions (*parihāras*).[153] This suggestion is immediately followed by another one—that the *vijigīṣu* should destroy the sowings or crops of an enemy entrenched in an inaccessible fort, as well as his supplies and foraging raids. This is not a contradiction, because this particular advice (accompanied by a recommendation of secret murder) is geared specifically toward weakening the enemy elements entrenched in the fort. Similarly with the option that Kautilya offers of destroying the enemy's capital city. The bottom line is that all *necessary* force should be employed in order to cripple and defeat the enemy.

Kautilya realistically discusses the practical problems involved in dealing with the army, the calamities (*vyasanas*) of the army, and the importance of honor and dishonor in the military field.[154] He asserts that an unhonored army will fight when honored with money; the dishonored army, with resentment in its heart, will not fight at all. The problem posed by deserters is mentioned, as is the possibility of an army assassinating their king.

THE TYPOLOGY OF WAR

There is a greater discussion of war than of peace in the *Arthashastra.* Book 10 is entirely devoted to war, but this is also a prominent subject of discussion in Books 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14. The fact that there are hardly any authorities (general or specific) cited in these books suggests that the analysis of war was one of Kautilya's important contributions to the discussion of statecraft.[155]

The clearest link between Kautilya's discussion of internal and external state policy and the fact that both are governed by *artha* is provided by his definition of advancement (*vṛddhi*) as the goal of external state policy. His definition of advancement focuses on economic undertakings.[156] Advancement (*vṛddhi*), decline (*kṣaya*), and the maintenance of status quo (*sthāna*) are all defined in terms of the promotion, decline, and stability of undertakings (*karmāṇi*), which are in turn explained as those concerning forts, water works, wastelands, mines, material forests, and elephant forests. Most of

these refer to economic activities. War must be waged after careful calculation of the likelihood of gain and the *vijigīṣu*'s strength relative to that of his adversary. The *vijigīṣu* should make peace with the one who is equal or greater in power, and make war against the weaker. The decision should be made after ascertaining his relative strength or weakness vis-à-vis his opponents in terms of the following: power, place, time, seasons for marching, time for raising armies, revolts in the rear, losses, expenses, gains, and troubles. He should march on the ascendancy of his own strength, not on the occasion of the enemy's calamity; or he should march when he is sure of being able to weaken or destroy the enemy. If the gain is certain, and he is stronger than his adversary, the *vijigīṣu* should march after making pacts with confederates, intent on achieving his own objective.[157] If there is equal advancement in war and peace, Kautilya recommends that the king should opt for peace, as war has many negative results. These include losses, expenses, marches away from home, and hindrances.[158]

It is not surprising that the language of the marketplace intrudes powerfully into Kautilya's analysis of war and peace. Men of energy can be won over and bought.[159] Bargaining (*paṇa*) is an important element in negotiations related to the making of a pact or going to war.[160] Short-term gains are distinguished from long-term ones, and the latter are more important. Kautilya refers to situations where bargains should be made for a lesser share. He also suggests that the vulnerable king who is about to attack another should bargain with one of the enemy confederates, offering him double the gain, in order to weaken or destroy the alliance against him.[161] While it can be presumed that in a work on *artha,* the goal of war is material gain, Kautilya does not discuss this in any detail. The goal of war that is specified by him is over-reaching or outwitting the enemy. However, in the context of marching after making a pact, he lists the possible gains as allies, money or gold, and land, each later one being preferable to the earlier one.[162] After being victorious over the earth, the king is exhorted to dutifully enjoy it.

Kautilya offers a basic threefold classification of war (*yuddha*). The three types of war that are listed in more than one place are: open war (*prakāśa-yuddha*), crooked war (*kūṭa-yuddha*),[163] and silent war (*tūṣṇīm-yuddha*). Open war is when fighting takes place at a designated and announced time and place. Crooked war involves creating fright, sudden assault, striking when there is an error or

calamity on the enemy's side, and retreating and then striking at the same place. All these tactics have in common the element of sudden, unexpected attack. Silent war includes dissimulation (pretense), ambush, and luring the enemy's troops with the prospect of gain. Its hallmark is the employment of trickery, secret practices, and instigation. This kind of war can be understood as covert war. There is some overlap between the second and third kinds of war.

Open war is the preferred option when the *vijigīṣu* is superior in terms of troops, when secret instigations have been made in the enemy camp, when the appropriate precautions with reference to the season in which the march is happening have been taken, and when the king is on suitable terrain. In the case of the reverse situations, Kautilya suggests that the king should adopt crooked war. The fact that some of the strategies listed under silent war are discussed in the chapter concerning the weaker king (and the fact that open war is prescribed for the strong, prepared king) suggests that this kind of warfare is a good option for a weak king.

A fourth type of war, diplomatic warfare (*mantra-yuddha*) is mentioned separately.[164] This involves discussion, persuasion, and negotiation with the enemy, as opposed to military action. Kautilya advocates diplomatic warfare as one of the strategies that can be adopted by a weaker king. Other experts are cited as advocating this kind of war in situations where the *vijigīṣu* is attacked in the rear while he is marching against an enemy. They hold that in such circumstances, prosperity results from the use of diplomatic warfare because conventional war involves expense and loss of prosperity for both sides. Even after winning a war, due to the depletion of his army and treasury, the king becomes a loser. Kautilya disagrees with this position. He asserts that even if it involves very great losses and expenses, the destruction of the enemy must be brought about. While this seems to contradict the statements made elsewhere about carefully calculating relative loss and gain, in this context, the emphasis seems to be on going in for decisive military action where victory is likely.

Kautilya also advocates psychological warfare. For instance, he suggests that on the eve of battle, astrologers should proclaim the king's omniscience and association with divine agencies and should fill the enemy's ranks with terror. He also suggests that the king should strike fear in the enemy by using machines, occult practices, assassins, the magical arts, association with divinities, carts, and

frightening elephants.[165] He should incite potential traitors by using herds of cattle, setting fire to camps, and attacks on the flanks and the rear, as well as by creating dissension by secret agents spreading false rumors.[166] Building up the morale of the king's own troops is also discussed: The commander in chief should announce honors and monetary incentives to the soldiers and along with bards, exhort them to bravery.

Surprisingly, in an analysis dominated by the calculation of profit and loss, there is also an evaluation in terms of levels of righteousness. Kautilya declares that a battle in which the place and time for fighting are indicated (this corresponds to open war) is the most righteous (*dharmiṣṭha*).[167] Honor and righteousness are also part of Kautilya's enumeration of the three types of attacking kings.[168] The "righteous victor" (*dharma-vijayin*) is satisfied with submission. The weak king is advised to submit to him, as well as when there is danger from others. The "greedy victor" (*lobha-vijayin*) is satisfied with the seizure of land and goods. The weak king is advised to surrender his wealth to him. The "demonic victor" (*asura-vijayin*) is satisfied only with the seizure of the enemy's land, goods, sons, wives, and life. If attacked by him, the weaker king should take countermeasures and remain out of reach. The three types of victors can be distinguished by the degree and nature of violence that they inflict on the enemy. The *vijigīṣu* is not directly exhorted here to be a *dharma-vijayin.* However, if we connect this section with Kautilya's injunctions elsewhere that the *vijigīṣu* should not covet the land, property, sons, or wives of the slain king,[169] he seems to be suggesting that the king should behave like a righteous victor.

But there are other places where bravery and honor seem to be pointless. The king should remain in the rear of the battle array, no doubt to protect himself.[170] In the context of the discussion of the policies that should be followed by the weaker king, Kautilya disagrees with the expert Bharadvaja's view that the weaker king should be submissive like a reed; he asserts that one who is submissive lives in despair like a ram that has strayed from the herd. He cites another expert, Vishalaksha, as saying that such a king should fight with the mobilization of all his troops because valor overcomes a calamity and because this is a Kshatriya's duty, whether there be victory or defeat in war. Kautilya disagrees with this view, too, and argues that one who fights with a small army perishes like a person who plunges in the ocean without a boat. His view is that when the

odds are stacked against the *vijigīṣu,* bravery is pointless, even foolish. He suggests that the best option in such a situation is to seek shelter with a stronger king or in an unassailable fort. Honor and dishonor are not irrelevant,[171] but they take a back seat. The connection between war, heroism, and honor is not broken, but is considerably weakened by making pragmatic calculation central to the discourse on war.

While not at all squeamish about the king's use of force to attain his ends, the *Arthashastra* also warns of its dangers. Excessive force should not be used against an enemy of superior strength who has just been broken. Harassing a broken enemy can backfire as the enemy, despairing of his life, might return and strike with irresistible force.[172] The advice about the dangers of excessive force also applies to a king's domestic situation. The danger of internal insurrection (*kopa*)—defined as a change in one's own people—always looms large.[173] The king should use means other than force (*daṇḍa*) against the people of the town and countryside.[174] The entire discussion clearly indicates that Kautilya makes a distinction between internal insurrection and war, between using force within the kingdom and against another kingdom.[175]

We have noted in Chapter 2 that among the king's three powers, Kautilya goes against the other experts in arguing that the power of counsel (*mantra-śakti*) is superior to military might (*prabhu-śakti*) and the power of energy (*utsāha-śakti*). He also speaks of achieving the results of war through other means, including marriage alliances, buying peace, and waiting on the enemy with a stipulated number of troops. Assassination is also a very useful strategy in lieu of war. An assassin can do the work of a whole army or more. Another potent strategy to deal with enemies is through the use of poison and magic. Although Kautilya disapproves of reliance on fate and astrology and appears to be an arch pragmatist, he attaches great importance to spells, charms, and magic. Book 14 is devoted entirely to a discussion of secret practices to deceive and destroy the enemy troops. This includes working miracles and using mantras, magic, potions, poisons, and spells to frighten, harm, or kill the enemy. The spells include those that enable one to see in the night or become invisible and those which make the enemy fall into a deep sleep (many of these involve cremation grounds). Being meticulous in all respects, Kautilya also gives the antidotes for all these, in case the enemy uses them to harm the *vijigīṣu*'s own troops.

Kautilya describes the six measures (*guṇas*) of interstate policy as the source of peace (*śama*) and activeness (*vyāyāma*).[176] This suggests that war and the other strategies are ultimately aimed at creating a situation of peace and activity. Peace and activeness are further described as the source of acquisition and security (or prosperity) (*yoga-kṣema*), which is directly in line with the larger goals of the *Arthashastra.* The possible results of the policy of the six measures are decline (*kṣaya*), stability (*sthāna*), and advancement (*vṛddhi*). Obviously, it is the third that is most desirable. Charles Malamoud has suggested that the *Arthashastra* thinks of war and peace not as two antithetical terms but as the two extreme poles of a continuum, and that the six measures and some of the strategies to deal with potential military adversaries (for instance the use of terror, black magic, and hostage-taking) suggest the idea of dissuasion.[177]

In its broadest sense, peace (*śama*) is defined as that which creates the security to enjoy the fruits of work. There is a distinction between this, *sandhi* (making a treaty), and *āsana* (staying quite). *Āsana* is explained as deliberately remaining still and remaining indifferent; it has a self-conscious, positive strategic value. The *Arthashastra* has a detailed discussion of treaties of various kinds, including those involving the making of payments. There is also reference to a "potsherd treaty," where excessive payments are received.[178] In his discussion of making peace, Kautilya also refers to the taking of oaths, surety, and offering or taking hostages. Unlike other authorities, who describe the oath as an unstable pact, Kautilya (surprisingly) says that a pact made through an oath is stable in this world and the next, and adds that kings of old made such pacts. But after lauding oaths, he points out (not surprisingly) that they can be transgressed, and therefore it is a good idea to be on the safe side by adopting back-up measures such as taking surety or hostages.[179]

Kautilya discusses various strategies for the pacification of the land after military victory (*labdha-praśamana*). He suggests that the king should honor all deities and hermitages; offer grants of land, money, and exemptions to those distinguished in learning, speech, and virtue; relocate robbers and *mlecchas*; order the release of prisoners; engage in propaganda of various kinds; and institute righteous custom.[180] Some of these recommendations match the evidence of royal land grants and the patronage of various types of religious establishments as legitimation and consolidation strategies by Indian kings.

Ultimately, Kautilya sees judicious force as just one of the many ways whereby the *vijigīṣu* can achieve his political aims. The intellect (*mati*) is the king's greatest weapon. An arrow shot by an archer may or not may not kill someone. But, Kautilya tells us, used by a wise man, intellect can even kill children in the womb.[181]

Ancient China offers a wide range of approaches toward the problem of war and peace, including the tributary system, covenants, hostage exchange, and matrimonial alliances.[182] The *Bingfa* (The art of war), which evolved between the fourth and third century BCE during the Warring States period, has a Taoist approach to war, and is addressed more to the military general rather than the king.[183] Its putative author Sun Zi has been compared with the early nineteenth-century Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz. Given their relative chronology, Clausewitz should be described as the German Sun Zi. The *Arthashastra* and *Bingfa* are both written in a very concise, terse style, and there are several similarities in their treatment of war.[184] Both emphasize the importance of spies, conventional and unconventional methods, deception, and psychological warfare. Both emphasize the need for careful calculation of the costs of war and the need for great caution before launching a military campaign. In both, it is not virtue or honor but success that is the most important goal of war. Perhaps because of its Taoist approach, the *Bingfa* emphasizes even more strongly than the *Arthashastra* the idea of war as a last resort:

> Being victorious a hundred times in a hundred battles is not the most excellent approach. Causing the enemy forces to submit without a battle is the most excellent approach.[185]

But when we consider their overall scope, there is no comparison. Sun Zi is basically concerned with military strategy. Kautilya's discussion of war is embedded in a much larger, detailed articulation of politics and the state.

Kamandaka's *Nitisara,* a political treatise written several centuries after the *Arthashastra,* also discusses the king desirous of victory (*vijigīṣu*). Introducing new elements to the discussion of the military strategies and battle arrays (*vyūhas*),[186] the text ends with a description of a successful military campaign. However, it also makes a strong case for the exercise of extreme caution in waging war, making pragmatic as well as moral arguments. Thus, although there is much in common between the *Arthshastra*'s and *Nitisara*'s discussions of war, there is also significant difference.[187]

Kamandaka gives a detailed list of the causes of war. These include the usurpation of the kingdom, the abduction of women, the luring away of learned men and soldiers, the killing of friends, and political rivalry.[188] The typology of war in the *Nitisara* includes the basic distinction between open war (*prakāśa-yuddha*) and crooked war (*kūṭa-yuddha*).[189] Crooked war includes duping and enticing the enemy, conducting nocturnal raids, and setting up camouflaged encampments. Kamandaka asserts that the king does not transgress dharma by killing the enemy through such tactics. The example given is that of Ashvatthama, who killed the Pandavas' sons in their sleep. Kamandaka also mentions diplomatic warfare (*mantra-yuddha*).[190] He does not use Kautilya's well-known typology of the types of victors—the *dharma-vijayin, lobha-vijayin,* and *asura-vijayin.* In the *Nitisara,* war is no longer graded, even nominally, according to a hierarchy of honor and propriety. The only relevant issues are its cost and chances of success.

What is most significant from the point of view of political theory, especially when seen in the context of the endemic warfare of the time, is that the *Nitisara* contains many very specific arguments against war. Objections to war on pragmatic grounds are to be expected in the political treatises. The basic point on which the experts agreed was that it was essential for the *vijigīṣu* to carefully assess the likely costs and consequences of war. According to Kamandaka, the potential gains of war are territory (this is the most important), allies, and wealth, and the king should embark on war only if there is a clear prospect of attaining these.[191] He also recommends a long-term perspective, pointing out that ultimate political or military success does not hinge on a single victory. Like

Parashurama, the king who commands respect from all through his prowess is the one who has to his credit many victories on many battlefields.[192]

Kamandaka lists sixteen types of war (*vigraha*) that should not be fought.[193] Although there were those who thought otherwise, for Kamandaka, there was no point in embarking on war if the enemy was much more powerful and the chances of victory bleak.[194] There was no justification for fighting a more powerful enemy, for clouds can never move against the wind. Even if the enemy equaled the *vijigīṣu* in terms of resources, war could lead to death and destruction, sometimes of both parties. Other wars that should not be fought include those for the sake of others or for the sake of women, those against venerable Brahmanas, those that promised to be long and drawn out, and those undertaken in times when troop movement was difficult.

The risks of war were enhanced by the uncertainties it entailed, and there was no point risking what could be seen for unseen gains.[195] This is why a prudent king should avoid war, even when it was thrust on him.

> As victory in war is always uncertain, it should not be launched without careful deliberation.[196]

The policy of reeds (*vaitasī-vṛtti*) rather than that of snakes (*bhaujaṅga-vṛtti*) should be followed; that it, it is better to be flexible rather than attack at the slightest provocation.[197]

Apart from the arguments against war based on expediency and the uncertainty of gains, many verses in the *Nitisara* dilate on the disastrous results of war, especially one launched hastily without due consideration and consultation. If a ruler acts in a manner contrary to the *śāstra* (the science, in this case, of politics) and suddenly falls on an enemy, it is unlikely that he will be able to get out of this situation without feeling the impact of the enemy's sword. In the course of war, the king could, in a single instant, suffer the loss of wives, friends, allies, wealth, kingdom, fame, and even his own life.[198] Considering the constant anxiety and mental suffering resulting from war, the intelligent ruler should not indulge in frequent warfare.[199] Thus, Kamandaka argues persuasively, recourse to war, especially frequent war, must be avoided.

The *Nitisara* points out that wars often serve the selfish interests of members of the political class other than the king. For instance, ministers may desire a war to be prolonged due to their own self-interest, and a ruler who acts on their counsel may simply play into their hands.[200] The idea of setting his house in order before launching fresh military campaigns is also emphasized when Kamandaka states that the internal *vyasanas* of the state should be remedied before a ruler launches an attack against the enemy.[201]

The text further points out that war is neither the only nor the best expedient (*upāya*) that the *vijigīṣu* could use to achieve his ends. Conciliation, gifts, force, and sowing dissension are the well-known political expedients mentioned by Kautilya. Kamandaka expands this list by adding three more: deceitful tactics (*māyā*), indifference (*upekṣā*), and magic (*indrajāla*).[202] He argues that conciliatory measures should always be adopted to prevent war.

The ancient political treatises refer to three types of power at the command of the king. Of these, Kamandaka, like Kautilya, describes the power of counsel (*mantra-śakti*) as superior to the power of lordship—that is, military might (*prabhu-śakti*) and the power of energy (*utsāha-śakti*).[203] Only by possession of the power of counsel does a ruler, following the track of statecraft, become capable of subjugating powerful enemies who are like vicious serpents.[204] Implicit here is the idea that brute force is not the best option for maximizing political gain. The political theorists were obviously keenly aware of the limits of the efficacy of force.

The last part of the *Nitisara* deals with the conduct of open war, and everything in the text seems to lead up to a crisp description of a successful military charge against the enemy. But before getting to this point, Kamandaka has offered his audience abundant and diverse arguments to make his point that war must always be a last resort. While Kautilya urges caution in war, Kamandaka's reservations are stronger. In view of the fact that war necessarily entails loss of men and resources, many dangers, and the death of principal officers, an intelligent ruler should not continue war, even if he has to willingly accept hardship. War, he asserts, has inherently disastrous qualities (*doṣas*).[205]

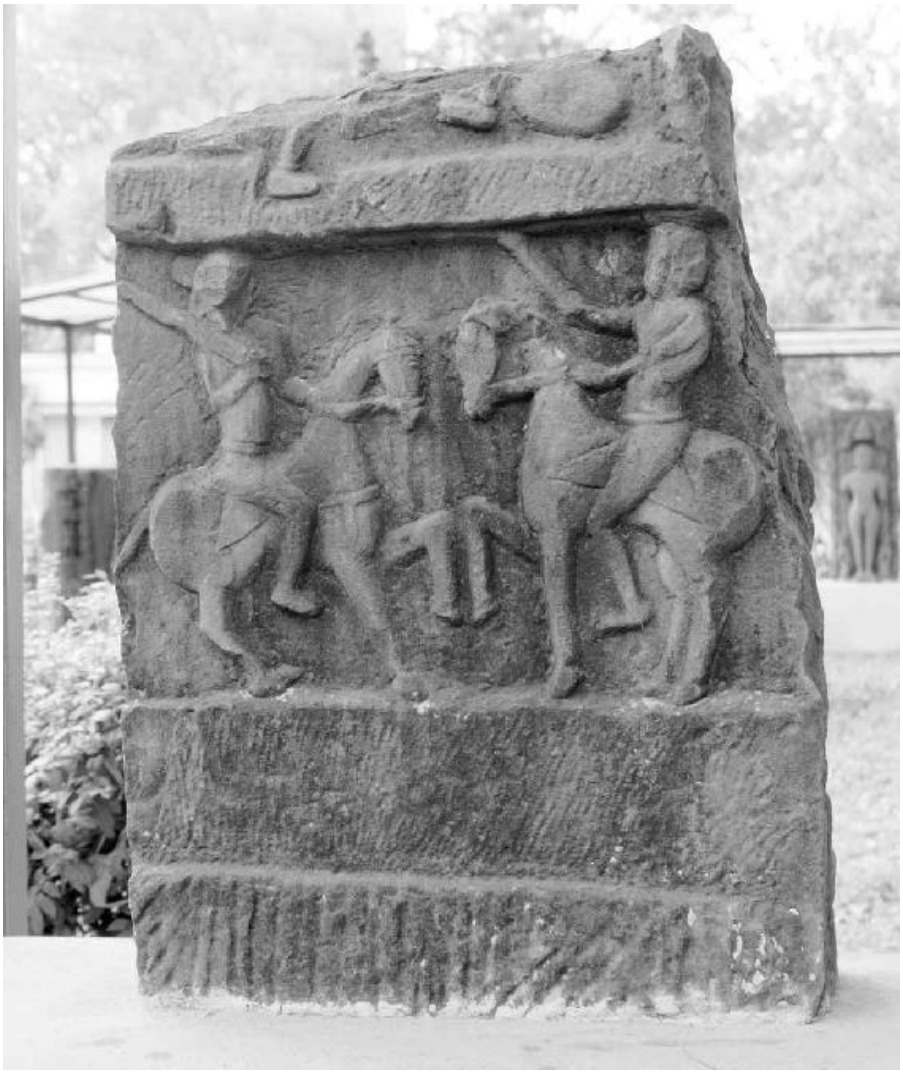
Memorializing Heroes and *Satīs*

Let us move away a while from the world of texts to the world of material artefacts. At the turn of the millennium, there is evidence of the practice of memorializing local heroes in the form of hero stones, a practice that eventually spread virtually all over the subcontinent. Hero stones were part of a larger tradition of memorial stones that sought to commemorate certain kinds of premature, heroic deaths that were considered culturally significant.[206] Associated with them were the stones commemorating *satīs*—women who had shown their extraordinary commitment to life-long chastity and devotion and loyalty to their husbands by immolating themselves on the latter's funeral pyres (see Figures 10, 11). The immolation of women was connected with the idea of the preservation or reinstatement of a woman's sexual purity in a highly patriarchal society, taken to an extreme form.[207]

The spread of the practices of erecting hero and *satī* stones were concomitants of a steady escalation of warfare and an intensification of the cult of the hero. Hero stones may have emerged from the older tradition of megalithic menhirs, some of which may have been memorials. They can also perhaps be connected with the tradition of memorial pillars known as *yaṣṭis*, which were set up by ruling elites for deceased ancestors and are found, for instance, in western India during the early centuries CE.[208] But for the earliest direct literary and archaeological evidence of the practice of erecting hero and *satī* stones, we must look farther south.

Early classical Tamil literature—often referred to as "Sangam literature"—provides us with eloquent evidence of the cult of the hero in South India. Composed between roughly the third century BCE and the third century CE, the Sangam corpus includes six of the eight poetic anthologies of the *Ettutokai,* nine of the ten *pattus* or songs included in the *Pattuppattu,* and the earliest parts of the first two books of the grammatical work, the *Tolkappiyam.* Modeled on bardic songs, the poems, which are of two types—*akam* (love poems) and *puram* (heroic poems)—are a rich and evocative source for the history of early historic South India. The *puram* poems eulogize the bravery and generosity of great kings and chieftains and reveal the close, reciprocal relationship between poets and patrons.[209] While the poets

were dependent on their patrons for material support, kings could attain lasting fame only through the poets' praise of their generosity and heroism.[210] The poems also reflect the emergence of new bases of royal prestige and legitimacy in South India: the performance of Brahmanical sacrifices and the worship of various gods. Several poems refer to the king's performance of Vedic sacrifices. Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions of about the same period, found in various parts of South India, record royal patronage of Jaina ascetics.



10 Hero stone, Vidisha Museum

Photograph: Upinder Singh

11 *Satī* stone, Bhojpur

Photograph: Upinder Singh

The Tamil poems are pervaded by war. We hear of fearless kings, chieftains, and warriors, thirsting for fame (*pukal*) and fighting their enemies, who were sometimes their own kin. A heroic death was greatly valued, and it was believed that the spirit of a warrior who died in battle would dwell in paradise. It seems that the bodies of warriors who did not die in battle were cut with swords before the funerary rites, to simulate death in battle. The enormous cultural importance of a heroic death is revealed in many a Sangam poem.

Many said,
That old woman, the one whose veins show
on her weak, dry arms where the flesh is hanging,
whose stomach is flat as a lotus leaf,
has a son who lost his nerve in battle and fled.
At that, she grew enraged and she said,
"If he has run away in the thick of battle,
I will cut off these breasts from which he sucked,"
and, sword in hand, she turned over fallen corpses,
groping her way on the red field.
Then she saw her son lying there in pieces
and she rejoiced more than the day she bore him.[211]

The Tamil poets excelled equally in subtlety and a minimal use of words to describe dramatic events related to war. A poem speaks of a defeated king committing ritual suicide by starving himself to death, accompanied by those who had been close to him during his lifetime:

On an island in a river,
in spotted shade,
you sit and your body dries up.
Are you angry with me, warrior,
who have asked so many to join you here?[212]

The context of this poem is king Kopperuncholan performing ceremonial suicide on a river islet after a defeat in war. The poet expresses his grief that he had not been asked to accompany his lord into death.

Memorial stones known as *natukals* and *virakals* were erected in honor of heroes who died fighting. The spirit of the fallen hero was believed to reside in them, and they were worshipped. The stones were adorned with garlands and peacock feathers, the warrior's weapons were sometimes placed before them, and ritual offerings of rice balls, liquor, and animals were made. It is not easy to date the extant hero stones, but recent discoveries of stones with Tamil–Brahmi inscriptions at Pulimankompai in Tamil Nadu suggest that the tradition may be older than generally believed.[213] One of these stones, raised in memory of a man who died in a cattle raid, seems to belong paleographically to the third century BCE and corroborates the

references in Sangam poems to “hero stones with letters.”

More elaborate datable hero stones come from third / fourth century Nagarjunakonda in the Krishna valley. Here, at the site of the ancient Ikshvaku capital known as Vijayapuri, there were a large number of memorial pillars, referred to in the inscriptions as *chāyā thabhas*. Several carry inscriptions as well as carvings of war scenes. A Prakrit inscription on a pillar prominently located outside the eastern gate of the citadel announces it as the memorial pillar of a great commander in chief (*mahāsenāpati*) of the Ikshvaku king Chamtamula. The inscription describes the commander in chief as one who had attacked the camps of the enemies and seized the elephants of an enemy named Olabaku. Another memorial pillar, one among a cluster, is that of a commander in chief and general (*mahāsenāpati, mahātalavara*) named Ayabhuti who belonged to a place called Koduva. There is also a memorial stone in memory of a prince Ehavuladasamnaka, who seems to have been a step-brother of the reigning king and a commander in chief. Four memorials stones found to the north of the habitation area have short inscriptions, indicating that they were erected for groups of soldiers who had been killed in battle.[214] These carry no names and contain no reference to the reigning king, but they mention the names of the chieftains or generals under whom the soldiers had fought, all of whom were inhabitants of a place called Mangalarana. It is evident that a great battle, possibly several, had been fought near the capital city. Heaps of elephant bones outside the citadel area and iron weapons (spears, dagger, arrowheads) in megalithic burials also reveal that war was an important element in the city’s history.

Vijayapuri (ancient Nagarjunakonda) was no cultural backwaters, but a thriving political and cultural metropolis. Apart from inscribed hero stones, it yielded evidence of a royal citadel, Buddhist complexes, Hindu temples, as well as civic structures. King Chantamula is described in Ikshvaku inscriptions as having performed various Vedic sacrifices, and the site gave evidence of what seems to be a sacrificial altar, replete with a horse skeleton, which seems to have been associated with an ancient *aśvamedha* sacrifice. All this shows that the tradition of hero stones was not, as is often held, confined to transitional zones between the agrarian tracts and forest and pastoral areas. Nor was it necessarily culturally divorced from the mainstream ideology of war in the well-established kingdoms.

Associated with the hero stone tradition was the tradition of

memorializing *satīs*. There is a reference in Book 7 of the *Ramayana* (generally considered a later addition to the text) to the mother of the female ascetic Vedavati committing *satī* on her husband's death. The *Mahabharata* gives us a few more references to the practice. Madri, one of Pandu's wives, decides to die when he dies. The four wives of Vasudeva (Krishna's father) and the five wives of Krishna kill themselves on the death of their husbands. But none of these cases occur in the context of war. The widows of the heroes who die in the *Mahabharata* battle mourn, but they do not mount their husband's funeral pyre.

The earliest eye-witness account of the practice of women immolating themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands in the context of war occurs not in an Indian but in a first-century BCE Greek text, the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Sicilus. Diodorus describes the battle between the armies of two of Alexander's great generals—Eumenes of Cardia and Antigonus Monophthalmus—which took place in 317 BCE at Paraitakene, northwest of Persepolis. We are told that Ceteus, the general of the Indian contingent that was part of Antigonus' army, was killed in battle while fighting heroically. His two wives, who had accompanied him as part of the army entourage, apparently vied with each other for the honor of being burnt with their husband on his funeral pyre. (Diodorus goes into an aside on the origins of the practice.) The older one was found to be pregnant, so the younger wife was the chosen one. The army marched around the pyre three times before it was lit. The woman distributed her ornaments, ascended the pyre, and embraced death heroically without a cry. The Greeks watched spellbound, some filled with admiration, some with pity, and others with disapproval of what they saw as a barbaric Indian custom.

Sangam poems allude to the idea of a loving, loyal wife following her husband into death. A poet refers to a woman who

> wanders toward the burning ground, her hair streaming wet
> and falling loose down her back while her large eyes are filled with grief!
> Though she, in the vast well-guarded palace of her husband
> where the eye of the concert drum is never silent, has only been alone for a while,
> she is fleeing her young years that make her tremble with the

sweetness of life![215]

Nagarjunakonda gives what may be the earliest material evidence of the practice of *satī.* Overlooking the Krishna River are the remains of a damaged brick complex that seems to have been connected with royal funerary rituals and the worship of the god Shiva. Two relief carvings on limestone slabs were found here: one seems to show a princess or queen lying dead; the other shows a woman about to jump from a ladder placed between four fires. Two stone slabs in the adjoining pillared hall had the word *sva-medha* (self-immolation) inscribed on them.[216] Although there is no direct indication that these acts were connected with the death of the husbands in war, given the presence of many hero stones at the site, we can assume that they were.

Hero and *satī* stones continued to proliferate over the centuries, indicating an intensification of the cultural valorization of the warrior ethic. The increasing numbers of *satī* stones indicate that the virtues of life-long chastity, devotion, and loyalty to the husband—emphasized in general for all women—were taken to a special extreme for the wives of fallen warriors. While epigraphic panegyric advertises the military achievements of great kings, the vast majority of hero stones memorialize the death of unnamed nonroyal local heroes who died in battle. The fact that most of the stones are uninscribed speaks volumes of the belief in the commemorative power of the image over writing; the memories of these men's heroic death must have been kept alive through oral traditions. There are, however, exceptions. A stone inscription found at Eran in central India has relief sculptures and an inscription which tells the following story: In year 191 (of the Gupta era)—that is, in 510–511 CE—a lord named Goparaja accompanied into battle king Bhanugupta (a later Gupta ruler) who was equal in valor to Partha (Arjuna). Goparaja fearlessly fought along with his lord in a great and famous battle against the Maitras (this may have been a battle against the Hunas) and died fighting. He went to heaven and became the equal of the god Indra. His devoted, attached, beloved, and beautiful wife—her name is not given—entered the funeral pyre with him, clinging to his body.[217]

In the midst of the celebration of heroes and *satīs,* Sangam poems occasionally express critique and lament. We are told that the king's warriors armed with curved bows and sharp arrows have

taken whatever they wanted and what they have not taken,
so that no others may take it, they have destroyed—the grain no one now will cook.[218]

Very occasionally, the personal pain caused by war filters through, in a woman's voice.

If I start to scream, I fear that tigers may come for you!
If I hug you and try to lift you up, I cannot raise
your broad chest. May unjust Death, who brought you pain,
shiver till he is exhausted, just as I do. Take my hand
which is dense with bangles and we
will go into the shadow of the mountain. Only walk a little while.[219]

But such critique and lament are part of a tradition that ultimately upholds and celebrates the warrior ethic.

War in Royal Inscriptions

Although the cult of the local hero continued, with the movement toward mature monarchical states, a single great hero in the shape of the king gradually eclipsed all others in the political centers of kingdoms. It was *his* martial achievements that were usually considered worthy of detailed description and praise. Military defeats (of which there must have been many) are generally concealed or alluded to in an oblique manner. Celebrating the king as victor, the epigraphic *praśasti* offers a synoptic, selective, and poeticized account of significant and far-flung military victories. But as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, the warrior image is balanced by adding other qualities and accomplishments to present the king as an all-rounder. The representation of war in the Hathigumpha inscription of the Jaina king Kharavela has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. We turn to the treatment of war in some other important inscriptions: the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman, the Nasik inscription of Rishabhadata, and the epigraphs of the Vakatakas and Guptas.

On the Junagadh rock, sandwiched between descriptions of Kshatrapa Rudradaman's building and repair of the Sudarshana lake is a eulogy of that king, belonging to the mid-second century CE. Having mentioned his compassion (*kāruṇya*) and his adherence to his vow not to kill men except in battle, it goes on to detail his military achievements. Rudradaman had dealt blows to enemies who met him face to face. He was lord of the whole of eastern and western Akaravanti, Anupa, Anarta, Surashtra, Shvabhra, Maru, Kachcha, Sindhu-Sauvira, Kukura, Aparanta, Nishada, and other lands gained through his own prowess.[220] He destroyed by force the Yaudheyas, who were reluctant to submit on account of their being proud of their title of heroes among Kshatriyas. He twice defeated Satakarni, the lord of the south (Dakṣiṇāpatha), in fair fight and did not destroy him only on account of their close kinship. He reinstated deposed kings. Among his many excellent qualities and skills, which included proficiency in music, he was an expert in the use of sword and shield and in combat. He had been wreathed with many garlands at the *svayaṁvaras* of many kings' daughters (an allusion to his matrimonial alliances).[221] The overall emphasis of the *praśasti* is on a balance between military success and other notable and benevolent activities.

During the early centuries of the Common Era, war came to be connected with the ceremonial aspect of royal grants. An inscription engraved on the back wall of a cave at Nasik in western India records the generous and benevolent activities of Rishabhadata, son-in-law of the Kshatrapa king Ushavadata of the Kshaharata dynasty. We are told that Rishabhadata had given away 300,000 cows and much gold, and had built a river landing at Barnasa. He had gifted sixteen villages to the gods and Brahmanas, had fed 10,000 Brahmanas every year, and had had eight Brahmanas married at the holy place of Prabhasa. He had gifted houses at several places—Bharukachchha, Dashapura, Govardhana, and Shurparaka. He had had gardens, tanks, and wells made. He had established free ferries for crossing the rivers Iba, Parada, Damana, Tapi, Karabena, and Dahanuka, and charitable rest-houses and provisions for drinking water for travelers on both sides of these rivers. He had donated 32,000 coconut trees to the assemblies of the Charakas (wandering ascetics) at Pinditakavada, Govardhana, Suvarnamukha, Shorparaga, and Ramatirtha. This generous man, the inscription tells us (and this is its main purport), had excavated a cave and a cistern for Buddhist monks on the Trirashmi hill. He also bought a field for 400,000 *kārṣapaṇa*s and gifted it to the Buddhist sangha of the four quarters in order to provide for its principal food requirements. What interests us the most is the mention of military matters in the midst of this account of extreme munificence, told in the first person:

> I had gone to rescue the Uttamabhadras who had been besieged by the Mālayas. Those Mālayas ran away at the (mere) noise of my approach. I handed them over to the Uttamabhadra Kshatriyas. Then I went (to the holy place) of Pushkara. I bathed there and gave gifts of three thousand cows and a village.[222]

This inscription brings out the connection between war, pilgrimage and pious gifts and suggests that victories in war were often followed by generous royal grants.

Another inscription in a Nasik cave contains an epigraphic proclamation of the Satavahana king Gautamiputra, issued from his victorious army camp (*senāye vejayaṁtiye*) at Govardhana. This announces that a field measuring two hundred *nivartana*s in a certain village that was previously owned by Rishabhadata had been endowed

with various exemptions and privileges and given by Gautamiputra to the Buddhist monks living on Trirashmi hill.[223] Gautamiputra and Rishabhadata were adversaries, and it seems that this particular monastic community had special political significance, the patronage of one king being replaced by that of another, when territorial control changed with the vicissitudes of war. Such inscriptions illustrate that in kingdoms of the Deccan, kingship had come to be closely associated with gifts to Brahmanas and Buddhist monks during the early centuries CE.

In Chapter 2, we saw the crafting of a balanced poetic eulogy of kingship in the Nasik inscription (dated in year 19 of the Satavahana king Vasishthiputra Pulumavi), which records a land grant made by Pulumavi for the embellishment of a cave gifted by the queen mother Gautami Balashri to the Buddhist monks on (yet again!) the Trirashmi hill. As we have seen, the inscription contains a detailed eulogy of the erstwhile king Gautamiputra Satakarni, balancing various royal attributes, martial and nonmartial. Here, we are concerned with the former. Gautamiputra is described as the equal (in strength) to the Himavat, Meru, and Mandara mountains. There is a long list of areas under his sway—he was king of Rishika, Ashmaka, Mulaka, Surashtra, Kukura, Aparanta, Anupa, Vidarbha, and Akaravanti. He was lord of the Vindhya, Rikshavat, Pariyatra, Sahya, Krishnagiri, Mancha, Shristana, Malaya, Mahendra, Shvetagiri, and Chakora mountains (specific named mountains are given a great deal of importance in this inscription).[224] His commands were obeyed by all the circles of kings. His war elephants had drunk the water of the three oceans. This peerless Brahmana king had humbled the pride of the Kshatriyas, had destroyed the Shakas, Yavanas, and Pahlavas as well as the Kshaharatas, and had established the fame of the Satavahana family. His feet were worshipped by all the circles of kings. He had defeated many enemies in many battles, and his victorious banner had never been captured. His capital city was impregnable. He was a great archer and hero, equal in prowess and luster to the legendary epic-Puranic kings such as Rama, Krishna, Arjuna, and Bhima. He had won great victories in battlefields crowded with various semidivine beings. He pervaded the sky with his luster when he appeared seated on the back of a fine elephant. Gautamiputra's son Vasisthiputra Pulumavi, during whose reign this inscription was inscribed, is described as the lord of Dakshinapatha (lord of the South). Through such general assertions as well as very specific references to kings they had

defeated, and places and mountains over which their sway extended, the Satavahanas claimed lordship over the whole of peninsular India.

Political hierarchies became more sharply defined in the mature monarchies of circa 300–600 CE. The increased representation of war in the panegyric was accompanied by a continued, systematic tempering with other features. Making land grants—mostly to Brahmanas, and some to deities and temples—became a major royal policy aimed at building social alliances and political integration, and epigraphic records of such grants contain eloquent expressions of royal ideology. This practice was not as prominent among the imperial Guptas as it was among the Vakatakas and the Gupta feudatories. While the rationale of royal eulogies on victory pillars can be understood, it is less clear why royal copper-plate grants, which would have been kept in the safe possession of the donees, became vehicles for the advertisement of royal victories and virtues. Perhaps the copper plates were brought out from time to time and their contents read out loud, or perhaps the sheer fact of indelibly inscribing the king's glorious achievements on metal was considered an important symbolic confirmation of his power.

One of the striking aspects of the political ideology of this period is an increased importance of the horse sacrifice as a victory rite and claim to political paramountcy. Kings of many dynasties, including the Guptas, Vakatakas, Pallavas, and Chalukyas, claim to have performed this sacrifice, in some cases more than once. This is a continuation, but also an accentuation, of a practice associated with the Shunga, Satavahana, and Ikshvaku kings of earlier times. Pushyamitra Shunga is credited with having performed two *aśvamedha*s, Samudragupta and the Vakataka king Pravarasena I with four, and Madhavavarman of the Vishnukundin dynasty with eleven!

The Vakatakas were a Brahmana lineage, and their rise to power reflects a continuation of the phenomenon of martial Brahmanas, known in earlier times from the Shungas, Mitras, and Dattas. Vakataka inscriptions talk about rulers who had been vanquished by the king's resolve, force, and prowess.[225] Martial achievements are balanced with pacific virtues. For instance, in the Balaghat plates, Prithivishena II is described as the abode of valor and forgiveness.[226] Specific victories are advertised. Defeat is occasionally alluded to in a fleeting, poetic way. For instance the mention in the Balaghat plates of Prithivishena II having raised his sunken family suggests military

reverses suffered by his predecessors. Sometimes, there are conflicting claims to victory. For instance, Vindhyasena of the Vatsagulma branch and the Rashtrakuta king Mananka both claim victory over each other. Perhaps neither had won a decisive victory. Pravarasena I is described in his successors' inscriptions as having performed the *aśvamedha* sacrifice four times and as a righteous victor (*dharma-vijayin*). Victory of another kind is mentioned in the Ghatotkacha inscription of a minister named Varahadeva, which begins by describing the Buddha, dhamma, and sangha as victorious.[227]

The connection between land grants, war, and pilgrimage continued during circa 300–600 CE. Many Vakataka charters are described as having been written by or drafted in the office of the commander in chief (*senāpati*). Grants are also routinely described as the enemy-chastising order (*ripu-śāsana*) of the ruler. The Belora plates of Pravarasena II state that the grant was made at the victorious place of worship or piety (*vaijayika dharmasthāna*). Its ostensible purpose was to increase the king's religious merit (*dharma*), life (*āyu*), power (*bala*), victory (*vijaya*), and sovereignty / prosperity (*aiśvarya*); to secure his well-being in this world and the next; and to obtain blessings.[228] Such details suggest the likelihood that some grants were made after victories in war. Military officers such as *senāpati*s and *daṇḍanāyaka*s are mentioned in several donative inscriptions. Soldiers are among those addressed by the king in the Basim grant of Vindhyashakti. Irregular and regular troops known as *cāṭa*s and *bhaṭa*s start appearing in land-grant inscriptions and came to be routinely mentioned in land grants of various dynasties over the succeeding centuries.

Brahmanas usually appear as beneficiaries in royal land grants. But an interesting reference to potential violence emanating from Brahmana donees comes from the Chammak copper plate of Pravarasena II.[229] As mentioned in Chapter 3, this is a unique grant in which a large village named Charmanka was granted to one thousand Brahmanas. The grant was to last as long as the sun and the moon endured, with the caveats that the Brahmanas should not commit treason (*droha*) against the kingdom; that they should not be found guilty of the murder of a Brahmana, theft, or adultery; that they *should not wage war* (*saṁgrāma*); and that they should not harm other villages. If they did any of these things, a king would commit no theft if he revoked the grant. For our purposes, the reference to the possibility of Brahmanas committing treason and waging war is

intriguing.

The increasing militarization of kingdoms is even more evident in the Gupta empire. War and victory loom large in the inscriptions and seals of the Gupta monarchs.[230] Rulers are described as exterminators of all kings (*sarvarājoccheta*), without an antagonist (*apratiratha*); they are said to have acquired sovereignty through the prowess of their own arms; their fame is described as having tasted the water of the four oceans. A large number of military officers are mentioned in the inscriptions: *senāpati, daṇḍanāyaka* (this could have also been a judicial officer), *balādhikṛta, mahābalādhikṛta, sandhivigrahika, mahāsandhivigrahika, mahāśvapati,* and *daṇḍapāśika.*[231] A Basarh seal mentions the office of military stores (*raṇabhāṇḍāgārādhikaraṇa*). Inscriptions are dated in the king's "victorious reign." The victory of the gods, as that of kings, is hailed in some of the invocations.

In the Gupta empire, as elsewhere, the horse sacrifice was an important rite associated with the claim to political paramountcy. Samudragupta's inscriptions do not mention his performance of this ritual, but those of his successors refer to his having restored the *aśvamedha* sacrifice that had been long in abeyance. In the Poona plates of the Vakataka queen Prabhavatigupta, Samudragupta is described as having performed several *aśvamedha* sacrifices. This king's coins also portray him performing this sacrifice. The later Gupta king Skandagupta claims to have performed the *aśvamedha,* as well.

The connection between war and land grants is confirmed by the Nalanda and Gaya copper-plate inscriptions of Samudragupta (some scholars think that they are spurious or later copies of original documents), issued from the great camp of victory (*jaya-skandhāvāra*) of Anandapura and Ayodhya, respectively. Both places are described as being replete with ships, elephants, and horses. The Udayagiri cave inscription of Chandragupta II tells us that the donor, a Brahmana minister named Virasena, had come here with the king who was desirous of victory over the whole earth and had, through his devotion, made this cave for the divine god Shambhu.[232] The Sanchi inscription of Chandragupta II connects the grant made by him and his general Amrakardava to the Sanchi monastery with a military expedition into central India. The creation of a royal religious complex at Udayagiri, not far from Sanchi, also seems to have been connected with these campaigns.

Gupta inscriptions are notable for the high quality of their poetry of war. This is especially reflected in two inscriptions: the Mehrauli iron pillar inscription of Chandragupta II and the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta. In three beautifully composed verses, the Mehrauli inscription summarizes the martial achievements of a king who had defeated the Vangas and Vahlikas and had acquired supreme sovereignty by the prowess of his own arms. The king was dead, but remained on this earth on account of his fame, which was based on his military successes. His

> great glory, the result of his destruction of his enemies, does not yet leave this earth like the heat [from the smoldering embers] of a now quiet fire in a great forest.[233]

The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta is a much more detailed and conceptually complex composition.[234] In Chapter 3, we saw the very careful balancing of the warrior image of the king with his other achievements and qualities. Here we will focus on the representation of Samudragupta's military campaigns. Samudragupta comes across in this inscription as a king who was decisive, militarily irresistible, and politically astute. One of the composer Harishena's great achievements was to describe the king's military victories in a manner suggestive of a high level of political strategizing on the part of the king and the poet's grasp of that strategy. This is not surprising considering the fact that Harishena was a senior military officer who must have been involved in planning and executing the military campaigns. Harishena gives us a picture of the Gupta empire as the fulcrum of a complex web of political relationships. Such webs of varying complexity and extent must have existed in earlier kingdoms as well, but the Allahabad pillar inscription offers for the first time an epigraphic description of war as part of a carefully thought-out policy of aggressive and yet astute military expansion. The sequence of the description of the events does not seem to be a chronological one. Harishena gives the details of Samudragupta's military campaigns within the framework of a conceptualization of political strategy that may have evolved as the campaigns unfolded and whose over-all contours must have been more clear in a post-facto reconstruction.

Samudragupta's martial qualities and achievements are described in vigorous detail, but the references to the violence of his war-like acts

are regularly punctuated and tempered by references to his nonmartial qualities and achievements. There is a careful balancing of war-like and pacific elements, an alternation between the two opposite poles. For instance, Verse 6 talks about the enemies whom Samudragupta had defeated in battle (*saṁgrāma*) developing repentance (*paścāttāpa*). (This reminds us of Ashoka's urging the forest people to repent for their wicked deeds.) But the verse goes on to tell us that Samudragupta's foes were so won over by the emperor that their minds were filled with joy and suffused with pleasure and affection (*sneha*). The king had turned enemies into adorers.

We are told that Samudragupta's fame arose from his having achieved the conquest of the whole earth (*sarva-pṛthivī-vijaya*). Using hyperbole, Harishena tells us that Samudragupta fought *hundreds* of battles of various kinds, with the prowess (*parākrama*) of his own arm as his only ally. The king's arm is mentioned very often in the inscription. Also striking is the aestheticization of war in true *kāvya* mode. Nowhere is this more evident than in Harishena's description of the king's body as

> most charming, being covered all over with the great beauty of the marks of hundreds of scars caused by battle-axes, arrows, spikes, spears, barbed darts, swords, iron clubs, javelins, barbed arrows, span-length arrows, and many other weapons.[235]

The poet lends specificity to the listing of weapons—no doubt a subject he was very familiar with—but combines these details to create an image of the king that emphasizes the beauty and magnificence of his war wounds.

Samudragupta may have inherited an empire that included the Magadha area of eastern India, radiating westward into the adjoining areas of what is today Uttar Pradesh, eastward into Bengal, and stretching northward to the Himalayan foothills. Many scholars have devoted their attention to the identification of the rulers and places mentioned in the inscription, but that is not our main concern.[236] Our main interest is in its situating of war within the framework of a deliberate and deliberative expansionist policy. The geographical range of the campaigns is great, extending up to the Punjab in the north, the entire peninsula, and beyond that, to Sri Lanka. The reference to Aryavarta and Dakshinapatha for the north and the south

suggest that the campaigns stretched across the subcontinent. Within this vast area, Harishena displays a concern for great specificity in naming and listing kings and their geographical locale and specifying the nature of Samudragupta's engagement and postwar arrangement with them. The precise sequence of the campaigns is unclear, but unlike Kalidasa's description of Raghu's conquest of the quarters (we will discuss this further on), they are not presented as a circumambulation of the subcontinent; nor is there a focus on the produce and landscape of the areas, but rather on the nature of the political relationship that was established as a result of the campaigns.

Samudragupta's initial military campaigns were directed toward extending his control over territories lying immediately beyond the nuclear area of his rule. Verse 7 of the inscription tells us that he "singly and in a moment uprooted" (*kṣaṇād-unmūlya*) three kings named Achyuta, Nagasena, and Ganapati, who had confederated in battle against him. In the same breath, the violence of that statement is balanced by a somewhat odd reference to his capturing a king of the Kota family while the latter was playing in the city of Pushpa.

After an interval of some lines, lines 19 and 20 of the Allahabad inscription refer to the king's blending of magnanimity with prowess, illustrated by his having captured and then shown the favor of releasing (*grahaṇa-mokṣ-ānugraha*) a series of kings, namely, Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kairala or Kaurala, Mahendra of Pishtapura, Svamidatta of Kottura on the hill, Damana of Erandapalla, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamukta, Hastivarman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka, Kubera of Devarashtra, Dhananjaya of Kusthalapura, and all the other kings of Dakshinapatha. These kings were evidently defeated but reinstated in their domains. The geographical spread of these campaigns ranged across trans-Vindhyan central India, Orissa, Andhra, and Kerala.

Immediately after this, Harishena tells us (in line 21) of Samudragupta's violent extermination (*prasabh-oddharaṇ-odvṛtta*) of many kings of Aryavarta such as Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarma, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandi, and Balavarman. In the same breath, glossing over the details of what must have been a series of bloody campaigns, he tells us that Samudragupta had made all the kings of the forest his servants. Unlike the kings of Aryavarta, these rulers do not seem to have been exterminated. They were forced to submit to the Gupta emperor and acknowledge his political supremacy.

So were many others. Line 22 refers to two sets of rulers located in eastern and northern India. The first consisted of the frontier kings (*pratyanta-nṛpati*) of Samatata, Davaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, and Kartripura. The second included the oligarchies of the Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas, and Kharaparikas. Samudragupta's campaigns seem to have signaled the death-knell of the powerful oligarchies of ancient India. The frontier kings and oligarchies are described as obeying Samudragupta's orders and performing obeisance before him. This suggests certain elements of a feudatory relationship, although there is no specific mention of their having provided troops.

Line 23 of the inscription mentions rulers with the epithets Daivaputra, Shahi, and Shahanushahi (they probably represented the last vestiges of Kushana rule) and the Shakas and Murundas. Harishena then swings from north to the south, and mentions the rulers of Simhala (Sri Lanka) and all the other island dwellers. These kings are said to have rendered all kinds of service to Samudragupta, sought the use of the Gupta *garuḍa* seal, and entered into matrimonial alliances with the great Gupta emperor of their own accord. The clubbing of the Kushanas, Shakas, and Murundas seems to have been on the basis of a perceived affinity in ethnic stock or to point to the northernmost extent of Samudragupta's influence. The reference to the southernmost tip of this influence, over Sri Lanka and "all the other islands," is significant.[237] This makes Samudragupta one of the few Indian kings to be credited with crossing the sea, even if it was a small stretch of sea. This is a departure from the generally land-locked Indian ideas of empire. It is an interesting coincidence that the king's name also alludes to the ocean.

Using poetic hyperbole, Harishena tells us that Samudragupta had no antagonist on earth. At the end of his reign, the king's empire seems to have included much of northern India and the highlands of central India. The inner core of directly annexed territories was rimmed by a large number of subordinate principalities to the east and north, which seem to have entered into some sort of feudatory relationship with the Gupta emperor. Beyond these, to the northwest, lay the principalities of the Shakas and Kushanas, on whom Samudragupta claims to have impressed his might. To the south, were the kings of Dakshinapatha, who were humbled but who suffered neither annexation nor a reduction to feudatory status. Still farther south was the island of Sri Lanka, which, we are told, also

acknowledged Samudragupta's suzerainty.

Through their military campaigns, the Gupta kings seem to have established a web of political relationships of paramountcy and subordination that extended over a large part of the subcontinent. Samudragupta's military attainments were measured not by the lands he had annexed but by the kings he had defeated and restored. His officers are also described as being ever busy in restoring wealth to the many kings who had been defeated by the might of his arms. Through an elegant sleight of hand, the Allahabad inscription ignores the vast areas that were not under the sway of the Guptas—for instance, the area under the Vakatakas. Harishena's achievement was to give an account of Samudragupta's irresistible and spectacular wars and successes, which, at first glance, gives the illusion of his being overlord of the whole subcontinent, but on closer reading, presents a more complex and limited picture of the empire.

Like the Allahabad inscription, Samudragupta's coins also emphasize his martial qualities tempered with his other attainments. We see him in different poses: as an archer holding a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right; standing with a battle-axe in his left hand; or trampling and killing a tiger. The "*aśvamedha* type" coin shows a sacrificial horse standing before a decorated sacrificial post. In the "standard type," which is the most frequent, the king wields a long staff (perhaps a spear, javelin, or scepter) in his left hand and offers oblations into a fire altar with his right; the *garuḍa* standard appears to the left. Legends on Samudragupta's coins emphasize his bravery and invincibility. He is brave as a tiger (*vyāghra-parākrama*) and a powerful performer of the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha-parākrama*). The longer metrical legends expand such images—"one who has won victories on one hundred battlefields and conquered the enemies wins heaven" or "the king of kings who performed the horse sacrifice, having protected the earth, wins heaven." At the same time, one of Samudragupta's coin types shows him sitting on a couch, playing the *vīnā* (lyre). The man seems to have been a great warrior, but much more than that.

At Nagori hill near Sanchi, we see an almost life-size free-standing stone horse on the hillside. Its stance, especially the position of its head, reminds us of the horse on Samudragupta's *aśvamedha* type coins. It is also similar to the Khairigarh sandstone horse in the Lucknow State Museum, which is inscribed with an inscription that is unfortunately very damaged. Do these horse statues reflect a practice

of commemorating the performance of the horse sacrifice? The stone horse on Nagori hill has a bridle, and it could alternatively represent a commemoration of a battle in this part of the country—a rare commemoration not of a warrior, but a war horse. Either way, they reflect the importance of war.

The Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta alludes to his having restored the sovereignty of his ruling house, which had gone adrift after his father's death. We are told that this king had conquered the earth with his two arms and that the earth quaked when he did battle with the Hunas.[238] This is one of the few direct references to the armed conflict of an early Indian empire with the White Huns, known in India as the Hunas. The Hunas were initially based in the Oxus basin in Central Asia and established their control over Gandhara in the northwestern part of the subcontinent by about 465 CE.[239] From there, they fanned out into various parts of northern, western, and central India. The Hunas are mentioned in several ancient texts such as the *Ramayana, Mahabharata,* Puranas, and Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha.*[240]

The Huna invasions were a major political threat faced by the Gupta empire. Apart from the Bhitari inscription of Skandagupta, the Junagadh inscription of the same king tells us that his fame was proclaimed by enemies who had been forced to return to the *mecchha* countries, their pride shattered to its very root.[241] The Hunas were referred to by their specific name and were also subsumed into the category of *mleccha.* In the Puranas, the rule of *mleccha* kings is described as one of the evils of the Kali age. As mentioned earlier, early Indian texts use *mleccha* as a catch-all term for foreigners (those living in or from outside the subcontinent) and tribal groups, especially for foreign invaders from the northwest. However, over time, foreigners and tribal groups were increasingly distinguished from each other. The forest tribals were referred to by their specific tribal name or by various generic terms such as *āṭavika, vanacarin,* and *araṇyavāsin.* Although both foreigners and forest people were "outsiders," a crucial difference was that some of the former came as invaders and eventually became part of the political elite. This is why the Brahmanical attitude toward them could not afford to be as hostile and condescending as it was toward the forest tribals. The Puranas' mention of the rule of *mleccha* kings as one of the evils of the Kali age reflects a grudging acceptance of political realities.

The Hunas are mentioned in several other Indian inscriptions. An oblique reference to them occurs in the early sixth-century Eran inscription of the later Gupta king Bhanugupta, which has been

mentioned earlier. This speaks of the king and his loyal associate Goparaja, who followed him there and lost his life in a very famous and bitter battle. The context suggests that this must have been a battle against the Huna ruler Toramana, and it seems that there was a struggle between the Guptas and Hunas for control over this part of central India.[242] Later, the Aphsad inscription (553 CE) of the Maukhari king Ishanavarman refers to his having defeated the Huna army. King Yashodharman is described in his Mandasor inscription (589 CE) as having surpassed the Guptas in his prowess and military successes, and as having remained unsubdued by the Huna chiefs who had established their sway over many a king. The seventh-century biography of king Harsha, the *Harshacharita,* describes his father, Prabhakaravardhana, as "the lion to the deer that were the Hunas." Still later, inscriptions of the Palas, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas, and Paramaras speak of their having defeated the Hunas, and the memory of the formidable Huna warriors lived on even in later centuries.[243]

Along with all their celebration of war, inscriptions also occasionally mention the benefits of peace. The Kahaum pillar inscription of the reign of Skandagupta (a private donative inscription) begins by referring to the *peaceful* reign of the king, whose audience hall is fanned by the breeze caused by hundreds of kings throwing down their heads before him in prostration.[244] Interestingly, this inscription records the setting up of images of five Jaina saints by a person named Madra. Perhaps it is the Jaina influence that was responsible for the infusion of the language of peace into this inscription.

War and Warriors in Sanskrit Literature

Let us turn to look at the evolution in the treatment of war in Sanskrit literature by focusing first on Bhasa and then on Kalidasa and Vishakhadatta. In Bhasa's plays, there are one-to-one battles and wars between armies, but even in the case of the latter, the focus is usually on encounters between specific heroes.[245] Battles are often described by onlookers such as ascetics, soldiers, or celestial beings. Bhasa frequently focuses on the warrior's code of honor and its infringement by the epic heroes. These infringements are built into the epic stories, but by making them the focus of special attention, Bhasa draws attention to the moral problems they entail. In the *Urubhanga,* Bhima ignores the rules of war at Krishna's behest (in the *Mahabharata,* the gesture is made by Arjuna) and strikes Duryodhana's thigh. In the *Abhisheka,* Vali tells Rama that he has transgressed the dharma of kings in killing him; he has used deceit, and infamy will descend on him. Rama responds that animals are often killed by use of traps and that he—Vali—was a wild animal. This is a repetition of the arguments made in the Valmiki *Ramayana.* In the *Dutaghatotkacha,* the old Dhritarashtra ruminates sadly on the killing of Abhimanyu and chides Duryodhana for killing a child; the latter retorts that Abhimanyu was no child.

We seem to be in the epic world of fate, oaths, and portents, and their literary conventions, but we are not. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that Bhasa's plays show creative departures from the epics and literary convention. Contrary to the conventions of Sanskrit drama, Bhasa actually shows one-to-one fights and death on stage. In the *Madhyama,* the fight between Bhima and his son Ghatotkacha—an incident absent in the *Mahabharata* and entirely invented by Bhasa—takes place on stage. In the *Balacharita,* Krishna fights with the two wrestlers Charnu and Mushtika and the demon Arishta and kills them on stage. The fight between Damodara and the serpent Kaliya is largely narrated indirectly through the description of onlookers, including Samkarshana and herdsmen; but some bits are shown directly. In the climactic fight, Krishna jumps up to the palace balcony, drags down his uncle, the evil king Kamsa, and delivers a powerful fatal blow to his head. In the *Abhisheka,* Sugriva and Vali fight on stage; Rama shoots an arrow at Vali, who dies on stage. In the *Urubhanga,* we see Duryodhana, his thigh smashed by an unfair blow

from Bhima, dragging himself painfully off the battlefield, and ultimately dying on stage. Nothing is left to the imagination. The violence of battle and the pathos of death unfold before the eyes of the audience.[246]

A significant aspect of Bhasa's treatment of war is that while the focus is definitely on the great heroes, ordinary soldiers (*bhaṭas*) are given speaking parts in the *Balacharita, Karnabhara, Dutaghatotkacha,* and *Urubhanga.* They are very prominent in the last of these plays. In one place in the *Urubhanga,* they speak in unison, as though a chorus, to describe the terrible noise of war.[247] But although they speak, they are not named—they remain generic, anonymous soldiers.

Gods and goddesses, royal sovereignty (Rājaśrī), and a curse are part of the plays' cast of characters. Personified weapons also appear as characters. In the *Dutakavya,* for instance, Krishna's weapon, the Sudarshana chakra, is treated thus. Weapon characters are even more prominent in the *Balacharita,* where the divine weapons of Krishna and the goddess Katyayani are personified. The five divine weapon-characters associated with Krishna are Chakra (discus), Sharnga (bow), Kaumodaki (club), Shankha (conch), and Nandaka (sword).[248] They appear on stage and announce and describe themselves. The goddess Katyayani appears with her retinue and talks about her martial exploits; her personified weapons have speaking parts, too.

The imagery of war in Bhasa's plays is in certain ways similar to that of the epics. War is like a sacrifice. and the battlefield like a sacrificial pit. The *Urubhanga* is notable for its long, graphic descriptions of the battlefield and for its depiction of the death of Duryodhana on stage. The battlefield is also described by three ordinary soldiers, who do so in terms of the familiar rivers of blood, decapitated bodies, blood-soaked carcasses of men, elephants, and horses, weapons strewn all over, and jackals and vultures feeding on the dead. It is a magnificent sight:

> Their [dead heroes'] eyes upturned forever are the swarming bees, their crimson lips the shoots, their knit eyebrows are the curled filament; raised high on stalks of arrows, blooming in the sunshine of valor in battle, these kings of fearless countenance look like a still lotus pond.[249]

But Bhasa adds his personal touches. In line with the numerous

references to painting in his plays,

> The battlefield resembles a painting [*citrapaṭa*] confused and crowded with elephants, horses, and kings slain in battle.[250]

War is a means for the warrior to attain heaven. The three soldiers talk among themselves about honor, glory, death and heaven. Can the ordinary soldier survive if death has prevailed over the great Kshatriya warriors, and does death indeed prevail over the latter? These could either be rhetorical questions or expressions of doubt.

Apart from describing war as a sacrifice, Bhasa also talks about war as sport. The battles of Krishna have a special quality and often appear as sport and spectacle. That is certainly how, in the *Balacharita,* Krishna describes his forthcoming battle (*yuddha*) with the Arishta bull. War is also described as a festival. In the *Dutavakya,* Duryodhana exults that his mind is dwelling on the festival of war (*raṇotsava*). He longs to smash and break the mace-like tusks of the lordly elephants of the Pandava army.[251] The *Karnabhara* also talks about the festival of war (*yuddhotsava*) and describes Karna as always the leader in this festival.[252]

As we have seen in Chapter 2, one of the most significant aspects of Bhasa's *Mahabharata* plays is that the stories are altered to give greater scope to envoys, negotiations, and resolutions to bitter conflicts, some of which actually prevent the outbreak of war. These plays present different kinds of endings: In some war is impending, in others it has happened, and in still others, it is averted. Peace missions are given great prominence. In the *Dutaghatotkacha,* Bhima's son Ghatotkacha is the emissary (this incident does not occur in the epic), who, on Krishna's instructions, visits the enemy camp during a lull in the war. He has come to urge a cessation of the devastation of war, but ends up merely exchanging threats and angry words with Duryodhana. The war will happen. As in the great epic, so in Bhasa's *Dutavakya*, Krishna is sent by the Pandavas to Duryodhana to try to find a peaceful settlement to the dispute. He urges Duryodhana to give the Pandavas their share of the kingdom and to put an end to hatred and anger. But Duryodhana is unmoved and orders his men to bind Krishna. And again, as in the epic, so in Bhasa's play, the god assumes his terrifying Vishvarupa form. But the playwright adds his own touch to the scene: Krishna's personified weapons appear, and the old king

Dhritarashtra pays obeisance to him. Krishna does not kill Duryodhana there and then because his weapon Sudarshana reminds him that it is his divine duty to defeat the Kauravas in war. So in the *Dutavakya,* as in the epic, negotiations fail. The war will happen.

In the *Pancharatra,* Drona and Bhishma urge Duryodhana to make peace with his cousins and to give them half the kingdom, arguing that dissensions in noble houses should be resolved peacefully. Duryodhana finally agrees to a proposal that forms the basis of a possible peace—namely, that if the Pandavas, who were living incognito at the time, were discovered within five nights, he would divide the empire with them. This is the direct opposite of what the epic suggests—namely, that if they were discovered, they would have to spend an additional twelve years in exile. This is followed by a cattle raid launched by the Kauravas against Virata, king of the Matsya kingdom, in whose realm the Pandavas are hiding. In the *Mahabharata,* Bhishma advises the raid so that the Pandavas can be discovered, and they are, but their thirteen years of exile are already over. The play ends on a positive note. With the Pandavas having been recognized, Duryodhana says that he will keep his promise and give them their share of the kingdom:

> "I do indeed bestow the realm on the Pandavas, as it was before.
> Even after men die, if they abide in truth, they abide.[253]

Drona and Bhishma's attempts to prevent a large-scale war over the kingdom have succeeded.[254] It has been suggested that this play was written for celebrations at the end of an actual family feud, perhaps among the Shakas.[255] Whatever the case may be, the play suggests that the containment of conflict within elite lineages and the prevention of war were serious concerns for Bhasa.

The *Karnabhara* and *Urubhanga* are especially important in the context of Bhasa's treatment of war and warriors. The *Karnabhara* is a short play set on the eve of the great war. The battle (*saṁgrāma*) will be raging soon. An ordinary soldier describes the battle scene: elephants, horses, and chariots throng the battlefield; princes as brave as lions roar fiercely; the noise is deafening. But what stand out the most in this play are the sorrow and anxiety that the great warrior Karna experiences at this crucial moment. He describes his conflicting emotions to his charioteer, Shalya, talking about the tragedy of his

life, his concealed parentage, and how, on this day that he has been waiting for all his life, he has been rendered helpless due to the vow he has made to his mother, Kunti (that he will not kill any of her sons, his brothers, except Arjuna). He tells Shalya of his acquisition of instruction in weaponry by Parashurama and the curse that that Kshatriya-hating Brahmana had given him when he discovered his Kshatriya parentage. Toward the end of the play, we see Karna's spirits suddenly reviving. He ruminates that regardless of victory or death, war is never futile; it leads to heaven or renown, and both are honored in this world. Divested of his armor and weaponry by the god Indra, but his morale and fighting spirit fully restored, Karna tells his charioteer to head to where Arjuna is. Bhasa's focus on Karna highlights him not as a villain but as a tragic hero. The Karna of the *Mahabharata* also has similar traits, but by writing a play exclusively about Karna, one that focuses on his bravery, generosity, and nobility, Bhasa gives a highly concentrated, positive characterization of this important Kaurava ally.

The *Urubhanga* is about the great battle between Bhima and Duryodhana. There is a detailed description of the two warriors, and Bhasa dwells on the beauty of their wounds. The fight is described, as are the reactions of the onlookers. Duryodhana and Bhima fight with maces. Bhima ignores dharma and, at Krishna's behest, strikes Duryodhana on the thigh. Balarama condemns Bhima's low blow and threatens to attack him with his plough. Bhasa presents the fallen Duryodhana to the audience, his thigh shattered, crawling on stage, and ultimately dying. The play focuses on the grief caused by war and on family relationships. The mourners appear—Dhritarashtra and his queens, the latter with their tresses loose, lament Duryodhana's impending death. The appearance of Duryodhana's young son Durjaya adds to the pathos. Hate and anger have ebbed and have made way for a mellow mood. In the deathly silence that has replaced the tumult of battle, Duryodhana advises an end to anger and grief, and urges Drona's son Ashvatthama not to seek revenge. As with Karna in the *Karnabhara,* Bhasa presents Duryodhana in a positive light and as a tragic hero. The play ends, in line with the *Mahabharata* plot, with Ashvatthama, sword in hand, declaring that he will massacre the Pandavas in the night.

The emphasis on negotiations suggests that peace was an important concern for Bhasa. At the end of the second act of the *Balacharita,* Kamsa speaks of peace. In the *Dutavakya,* a charioteer walks onto

stage, urging the organization of rites for peace. The goals of the cowherds are described as peace and cattle wealth. In the *Pancharatra,* the city people urge Duryodhana to discard his anger and to be kind to his kin. War is not the only way that Bhasa's kings try to overcome their rivals. Matrimonial alliances are also an important part of the game. In the *Pratijnayaugandharayana,* king Pradyota resorts to a stratagem to capture Udayana instead of taking the standard war route.

Bhasa oscillates between the horrors of war and its aesthetication and expands the literary representation of war in several creative and innovative ways. He lets the ordinary soldier appear and speak. He does not shirk from showing the violence and death of battle on stage. He highlights the problems of feuds within ruling lineages and the need for negotiation and peaceful settlement of intra-dynastic conflict. In one of his plays, even the Mahabharata war is averted. His treatment of the epic villains shows a radical reworking of their characterization, which highlights their bravery and brings out the pathos and sorrows of war, from the point of view of the defeated heroes and their kin.

In the middle of the first millennium, Indian kingship received its most comprehensive and elegant poetic expression in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha.*[256] As we have seen in Chapter 3, although the heroic element is important in the *mahākāvya,* it is part of a much more elaborate idealization of kingship.[257] The *Raghuvamsha* acknowledges that there can be many kings at any given point of time, but highlights the goal of political paramountcy. Such paramountcy is publicly enacted and expressed in the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, which is performed by Dilipa, Rama, and Atithi.

War is a natural corollary to kingship, and the reign of a great king must be marked by dazzling military victories. According to *Natyashastra* conventions, battle scenes should not be shown in drama (although, as we have seen, Bhasa does show them), but they could be described in detail in poetry. Many royal epithets in the *Raghuvamsha* allude to the king as a great victor, but military power is tempered with righteousness and restraint. Raghu is one who seeks victory (a *vijigīṣu*) but does not crave it; a righteous victor (*dharma-vijayin*) who wages war only for the sake of fame. It is this attitude that seems to be the hallmark of Kalidasa's idea of righteous war. But there is also an awareness of devious kinds of warfare—king Atithi seeks alliances with those of medium strength and attacks an enemy only after determining the strength and weakness of his six expedients; although he knows of crooked war (*kūṭa-yuddha*), he always fights in a righteous manner.

One of the important aspects of the *Raghuvamsha* as a political manifesto is its very specific and detailed mapping of the subcontinent as a political domain. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this mapping takes place three times in the poem. The first and most detailed one occurs in the description of Raghu's victory over the quarters (*digvijaya*). Apart from the battle between Rama and Ravana, this is the most important military episode in the *Raghuvamsha.* The notion of empire and sovereignty that it reflects does not involve conquest; it involves the demonstration of military superiority by the great victor and the acceptance of this superiority by defeated kings.

It has been suggested that Kalidasa modeled his account of Raghu's *digvijaya* on Harishena's description of Samudragupta's victories. Both are grand, imposing, overwhelming. The wars are described as

elaborate ceremonials rather than violent events. Samudragupta and Raghu both attain victories over Mahendra Mountain and Kamarupa. There is a striking similarity between Harishena's reference to Samudragupta displaying great magnanimity in showing favor by capturing and then releasing (*grahaṇa-mokṣ-anugraha*) the kings of the south, and Kalidasa's reference to the lord of Mahendra Mountain having been captured and released (*gṛhīta-pratimukta*).

But while there are similarities in the vast scale and scope of the imperium of Samudragupta and Raghu and a few specific similarities, there are also several differences. Kalidasa describes Raghu's *digvijaya* as an elaborate military circumambulation of the subcontinent, with an emphasis on the king's touching its cardinal points.[258] The description of the *digvijaya* is accompanied by a very specific mapping of the *cakravarti-kṣetra* (though this word does not occur in the *mahākavya*). According to Sheldon Pollock, Raghu conquers the same territory as the Gupta emperor Samudragupta, though he moves in the opposite direction.[259] Actually, as we have seen, the Allahabad inscription does not give us a clear idea of the precise directions and sequence of Samudragupta's military campaigns, whereas Kalidasa's description of Raghu's *digvijaya* is a carefully constructed clockwise circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*) of the subcontinent. The symbolic significance of the act of circumambulation—a central religious act in Indian religions—should not be missed. Although it has been suggested that the *Raghuvamsha* was loosely based on the Allahabad *praśasti*, it could well have been the other way around.[260]

Raghu starts by moving with his fourfold army toward the Eastern Ocean, uprooting kings, including those of Suhma and Vanga. He erects victory pillars in the spaces between the streams of the Ganga in Vanga country. He defeats the kings of Utkala and Kalinga and the lord of Mahendra Mountain. Then he moves southward along the eastern coast, across the Kaveri, Pandya country, and the Malaya and Dardura mountains. From there, his armies sweep across to the Kerala country and up the western coast to the northwest, where they battle with the Parasikas and the Yavanas. Thence, Raghu moves to the Sindhu country, defeating the Hunas and Kambojas. After this, he ascends the Himalayas; in his battles with the mountain tribes, flashes of fire leap out as arrows clash with stones hurled by slings. Raghu goes on to impress his might on the Utsavasamketas. The last lot of kings who face his wrath are the rulers of Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa in the northeast. The dust and din of war are on display as Raghu's

soldiers, elephants, and horses march on with determination. The irresistible might of elephants, their temples streaming with ichor, is singled out for repeated mention.

The mapping of Raghu's "field of victory" spans the entire subcontinent and is accompanied by references to the landscape, trees, and flowers and the produce of the various regions. Raghu sweeps along the eastern coast, dark with clumps of palm trees. His soldiers cross the Kapisha River into Kalinga on bridges made of elephants and after their victory, set up drinking booths where they quaff the milk of cocoa palms in cups made of betel leaves. They then move along the coast to Malaya country, with its pepper groves, sandalwood trees, and fragrant cardamom plants. The kings of Pandya country offer Raghu the finest ocean pearls. In the land of the westerners, his soldiers carouse in bowers of vine creepers strewn with deer-skins. In Sindhu (Indus) country, his horses shake off the saffron filaments clinging to their shoulders. As Raghu's army draws near, the king of Pragjyotisha trembles along with the black aloe trees to which his elephants are tied. It is a masterful geopolitical mapping of the subcontinent, not inferior to Kautilya's in its precision, but marked by great poetic beauty and elegance.

By and large, Kalidasa avoids graphic descriptions of the violence of war in favor of abstract aestheticized descriptions of adversaries who are overwhelmed and submit to Raghu; those who are uprooted; others who are uprooted and reinstated; and still others who offer presents, tribute, and obeisance.

> His march was clearly marked by many kings who were dispossessed [*tyājita*], deposed [*utkhāta*], or overthrown [*bhagna*], as the march of an elephant is marked by uprooted, broken trees, devoid of fruit.[261]

Raghu was not ruthless toward adversaries who submitted to him:

> Those who bowed before his lotus-feet and who were reinstated after having been uprooted [*utkhāta-pratiropita*], honored Raghu by presenting Raghu with their riches, like paddy plants, which yield grain after having been uprooted and then transplanted.[262]

Raghu's army encounters the Yavanas (Greeks), Parasikas (Persians), and Hunas in the northwest. The most gory description of all is reserved for the encounter with the "westerners" who are associated with cavalry warfare:

> There ensued a fierce battle between him [Raghu] and the westerners with their cavalry troops, wherein the combatants could be recognized by the twang of bows in the clouds of dust. He spread the earth with their bearded heads which had been severed by his arrows and resembled honeycombs covered with swarms of bees.[263]

Drawing attention to the distraught state of the women of defeated kings is a favored technique in Kalidasa's descriptions of war and military victories. As Raghu approaches, the Kerala women abandon their ornaments in fear. But there is an interesting twist to the description of the Yavana and Huna women. Kalidasa tells us that Raghu could not bear the flush of wine on the lotus-like faces of the Yavana women. And on the banks of the Sindhu, Raghu's prowess was manifest in the flushed cheeks of the Huna women.[264] While the redness of cheeks could be attributed to a state of agitation, it has been suggested by some scholars that the second reference shows Kalidasa's awareness of a central Asian tribal custom of women slashing their faces with knives on the death of their menfolk so that their blood mixed with their tears.

The perpetual, endemic nature of war in the *Raghuvamsha* stands out; so does the constant need to reassert power. Every time a king goes forth on a *digvijaya* or performs an *aśvamedha,* his successor seems to have to do it all over again. The justifications for war include the desire for *digvijaya* or specific precipitating events. For instance, war is inevitable when the jealous suitors attack Aja and his bride, Indumati, as they return home after their marriage. The war between Rama and Ravana may seem on the surface to be the result of the abduction of a woman, but in the *Raghuvamsha,* it is (as in the epic) part of a larger, divine plan. And yet, notwithstanding the importance of victories in battle, Kalidasa makes it amply clear that kings of Raghu's line seek military success and political paramountcy not for the sake of land or riches—they do not value such things—but for the sake of fame (*yaśa*). After his conquest of the quarters, Raghu

performs a grand sacrifice in which he uses up all the wealth he had obtained in his wars—the sacrifice is called the *viśvajit* (victory over the world). The king's real victory consists of ceremonially giving away everything he has.

The *Raghuvamsha* articulates certain important ideas related to war and empire—that empire involved military victories but not necessarily conquest; that the great king won many battles but did not crave victory or its fruits; that having attained victory, he thought nothing of giving up his kingdom and wealth and renouncing the world. It is the act of attaining victory and eliciting the acknowledgment of victory, not the actual possession of conquered territories, that is valorized. That is why, having achieved many great victories, a great king could give up his kingdom and walk away, his luster not just undiminished but enhanced. War is idealized and aestheticized; it is combined with renunciation. Its mundane objectives and its violence are almost completely erased.

Kalidasa's was not the only kind of literary representation of war in mid-first-millennium Sanskrit literature. Vishakhadatta's treatment of the subject in his *Mudrarakshasa* is, in fact, very different.[265] The reference in the invocation at the end of the play to Chandragupta having fought off the barbarians (*mlecchas*) suggests that Vishakhadatta had woven major contemporary conflicts into his play. But in the *Mudrarakshasa,* although war is in the air, it never happens. It is averted by Chanakya's clever stratagems.

The *Mudrarakshasa* refers to military confederacies and the making of alliances (*sandhis*), but Chandragupta does not seem to have any allies. If a war had broken out, he could not have won, so Chanakya's reliance on strategy seems to have been very pragmatic and sensible. Chandragupta's adversary, Rakshasa, on the other hand, has many alliances and confederates. He forms an alliance with Parvataka's son Malayaketu, who is backed by a large barbarian force that is poised to attack. At various places, barbarian (*mleccha*) kings or their people are named. They include Chitravarma of Kuluta; Simhanada, king of Malaya; Pushkaraksha of Kashmir; Sindhusena of the Sindhu territory; and Megha, lord of the Parasikas. Most of them can be located in the northwest. There is also mention of the armies of the Shakas, Yavanas, Kiratas, Kambojas, Parasikas, Bahlikas, and others. Rakshasa mentions various contingents in his own army: the Khasha and Magadha troops, the Gandharas, Yavana chiefs, Shakas, Chinas, Hunas, and Kaulutas. It is quite a multiethnic array of *mlecchas*, including the Chinese! Vishakhadatta has expanded the term *mleccha* to embrace not only foreigners and tribals but also other military adversaries within the subcontinent. Although supported by so many confederates, Rakshasa is not sure of victory in war. He is worried that his army has been infiltrated by Chandragupta's men. The outcome of war is uncertain, even for the stronger side. Although the troops stand by, ready to strike, Rakshasa employs strategy, assassination, and espionage to attain his goals.

In Vishakhadatta's play, the adversaries fight their battles not on the battlefield but in the mind and use psychological warfare rather than conventional weaponry and tactics. Rakshasa refers to the shafts of his intellect. He is desirous of attaining victory over the intellect (*buddhi*) of Chanakya. Chanakya describes his own intellect as one

that overcomes hundreds of armies. The situation is such that force cannot be used to his advantage, and Chanakya knows this better than anyone else. So he uses the other expedients. Once the enemy confederation has been weakened through dissension, their kings desert, and we are told vaguely without any detail that Chanakya succeeds in overpowering the whole barbarian army.

In act 7, Chandragupta marvels how Chanakya has overcome such a formidable army without war. He is also a bit disappointed, even embarrassed, that he, the king, has not had the opportunity of even stringing his bow:

> "Arrows, desiring to be united with their target, feeling ashamed because they are not used, are destined to lie idle in their quivers, their faces downcast, as if in grief."[266]

The moral of Vishakhadatta's play is that strategy is superior to force. The ends of war can be won by other means. And yet, although it offers a brilliant insight into war as a mindgame, the impact of the *Mudrarakshasa* as a political tract was minimal compared to the great renown achieved by Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha,* which became a highly influential template of normative kingship.

War Versus Strategy in the Panchatantra

Although a very different kind of work, the *Panchatantra*'s approach toward war is in several ways similar to that of the *Mudrarakshasa.*[267] The animals of the *Panchatantra* are at constant loggerheads with each other. Like the *Jataka,* the *Panchatantra* has the idea of "natural enemies"; such enmity can on occasion be transcended, although when it is, it is a remarkable thing. The enmity between the snake and mongoose is natural and perpetual, but the crow and the mouse do ultimately become friends. But this only happens in Book 2, which deals with the subject of friendship. The lion king constantly fights one-on-one battles, not ones involving armies, against elephants, oxen, buffaloes, tigers, and leopards. There is an interesting analogy of the bloody bodies of the lion and ox wounded in battle resembling *palasha* trees in bloom, which is reminiscent of the comparison of the bloody bodies of fallen warriors with *kimshuka* trees in the *Mahabharata.*[268]

Two approaches to war are discussed in Book 1 of the *Panchatantra* by the ox Samjivaka and the jackal minister Damanaka, both of whom serve the lion king Pingalaka. Damanaka has turned the lion king against Samjivaka by feeding him lies, and the latter is now wondering what he should do. Samjivika wonders whether he should fight, and cites the traditional heroic ideal:

> "The worlds that men yearning for heaven reach,
> by sacrificing a lot,
> by doing penitential acts,
> by giving plenty of alms;
> Those same worlds the brave in an instant reach,
> by losing their lives
> in a righteous war [*su-yuddha*]."[269]

But the clever Damanaka tells Samjivika that this is not a wise strategy. If one starts a fight against a stronger foe, one will only come to grief. He then urges the lion king Pingalaka to kill the ox, and when Pingalaka feels remorse after the killing, he reminds him that a king has to kill his enemies.[270]

War, peace, and counsel are also extensively discussed in Book 3, which is devoted to the conflict between the crows and the owls, and

how the former ultimately win due to their king following the clever strategy advocated by the crow minister Chiranjivi. The enmity between the crows and owls is described as natural, but we are also told that it arose on a specific occasion due to a silly comment made by an over-talkative crow. (Interestingly, the *Jataka* also alludes to the enmity of the crows and owls, but describes its origin in the crow having ruined an owl's chances of becoming king of the birds by commenting on his grumpy look.) The owls are described as martial, and reference is made to the owl king's *digvijaya* (victory over the quarters).

The *Panchatantra* repeatedly underlines the need for kings to be able to discriminate between good and bad advice, and the owl king is not able to do so. It turns out that norms such as not harming an envoy are not to be followed, and that the cruel owl minister's advice to kill the asylum-seeking crow is, in fact, the right thing to do. The crows' using fire to choke out the enemies from their homes in the trees is reminiscent of Kautilya's recommendations to set fires in tunnels of the enemy to smoke them out. But there is a similarity with the larger perspective of the *Arthashastra* as well as the *Mudrarakshasa* —namely, that bravery and force are not enough to achieve complete success against the enemy. Strategy and cunning are more effective than swords:

> "An arrow that an archer shoots will kill
> one man, or none at all;
> A sharp mind unleashed by a gifted man
> Will crush a kingdom along with its king."[271]

The Variety of Perspectives

The world revealed by our sources—for the most part composed for and by men in a patriarchal male-dominated society—is very much a male world, where male actors and perspectives dominate. The few feminine warrior images we see in the ancient texts include Vishpala in the *Rigveda,* Shikhandi and Brihannada in the *Mahabharata,* references to women guarding the king in the *Arthashastra,* and images of women bearing weapons in Sanchi sculpture. But women participated in the ancient heroic world in other ways as well, principally as instigators or lamenters, as in the *Mahabharata.* The most dramatic and powerful equation of war with femininity occurred at the religious level, in the increasing popularity of the goddess Durga, whose exploit of killing the buffalo demon Mahisha is represented in sculpture at many Hindu temples during the succeeding centuries.

War was a part of political life but not a problem in the Vedic world. The justification and critique began in the post-Vedic age. Texts and artefacts reveal elements of similarity, diversity, and change over the twelve hundred years between circa 600 BCE and 600 CE. For all their emphasis on nonviolence, by and large, the early Buddhist and Jaina traditions do not contain a strong or consistent indictment of war, as part of their larger realization that absolute nonviolence was not possible in the political sphere.

The deepest self-conscious awareness and reflection on the violence and savagery of war appear in the *Mahabharata* and Ashoka's inscriptions. It is only here that we encounter reflections on the tragedy of war perhaps comparable in intensity to that in Aeschylus's plays. Of course, the outcome of the Mahabharata events and Ashoka's reflections on war are very different. In the *Mahabharata,* there is much agonizing on the terrible nature of a war against kin, but ultimately war prevails. In Ashoka's case, a terrible war leads to his renouncing war, although his pacifism does not extend to the borderers and forest people.

The political theorists offer mainly a pragmatic set of arguments from the perspective of the *vijigīṣu.* Kautilya and Kamandaka recognize war as a normal part of interstate relations and as necessary for the upwardly mobile king and discuss it in great detail, but they both urge

extreme caution and calculation before launching a war. The *Nitisara,* which describes the negative fall-out of war with great detail and emphasis, suggests a more negative view of warfare than its predecessor, and its pragmatic arguments are buttressed by what seems to be a moral one about the inherently negative nature of war.

The litterateurs Bhasa and Kalidasa both deal with war, but not in identical ways. Bhasa brings the violence of war onto the stage, gives a voice to the ordinary soldier, and emphasizes negotiation to prevent intra-dynastic conflicts from turning into war. But the more influential view was that war was an inevitable part of kingship, and that its violence had to be concealed and turned into something else. This required celebrating the king's wars by making grandiose claims as well as specifying military successes, and simultaneously carefully balancing the martial aspect of kingship with pacific and benevolent elements. This is evident in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* and in royal *praśastis*. By the middle of the first millennium, poets and artists had perfected a highly aestheticized articulation of war, which was expressed in poetry, drama, inscriptions, and coins. However, the *artha* view persisted. In the *Mudrarakshasa,* political goals are pursued ruthlessly and attained purely through the use of complex stratagems. The ruthless pursuit of political goals is also visible in the animal fables of the *Panchatantra,* where animals kill or outwit their enemies using brute force and cunning.

As we have seen, especially in the *Mahabharata* and the *Nitisara,* war could be justified and aestheticized, but anxieties about it could not be eliminated. These anxieties are also visible in Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita.* This text contains very frequent references to the portents of invasion, defeat, and victory in war, and speaks of the danger or calamity of war (usually referred to as *śastra-bhaya*), often in the same breath as the calamities of famine and disease. The rain of blood is a portent of impending war. The concerns for victory are also expressed through war-related rituals that may have been performed by ancient Indian kings. The ceremony of Indra's banner (Indradhvaja) is a rite that bestows power, prosperity, and victory on the king and protects him from his enemies.[272] The lustration rite known as *nīrājana* involves the king, his horses, elephants, and warriors, and is performed before setting out for war.[273]

An interesting aspect of the Indian attitude toward war throughout the twelve hundred years we have surveyed are the scant details of the many invasions from the northwest. Early Orientalists remarked

with incredulity on the absence of reference in Indian sources to the invasion of Alexander of Macedon. The reason may be that the invasion was a brief episode that barely grazed the fringes of the subcontinent, one that was considered more significant by the Greeks than the Indians. But what about other invasions, for instance, those that occurred between circa 200 BCE and 200 CE? We do not get any detailed accounts of these events in the Indian sources; the accounts come from elsewhere. The narratives usually have to be painfully pieced together from the epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological data, or from much later Indian textual or foreign sources. There are a few epigraphic references. Kharavela claims to have defeated the Yavana king Dimita. Gautamiputra Satakarni states that he had destroyed the Shakas, Yavanas, Pahlavas, and Kshaharatas. The lists of victories do not seem to distinguish between "indigenous" and "foreign" foes. Among the many invaders who surged into the subcontinent during the period we have surveyed, it is the Hunas who seem to have left the longest and most powerful imprint in Indian texts and inscriptions, although, like other invaders, they were swiftly assimilated into the Indian cultural matrix.

Early Indian texts mention specific "foreign" people like the Yavanas, Shakas, Tushkaras, Pahlavas, Chinas, and Hunas, and also collapse them into the more generic category of *mleccha*. The term *mleccha* not only referred to cultural "others" (tribals and foreigners) but also contained elements of military conflict. This emerges clearly in the expansion of its meaning in the *Mudrarakshasa*. The attitude of Brahmanical dharma experts toward *mlecchas* was one of great ambivalence, and included attempts to incorporate them into the fold of the Brahmanical social order by describing them as the result of inter-*varṇa* unions or as degraded Kshatriyas.[274] The accommodative attitude toward some of these groups was no doubt due to the fact that the invaders eventually settled down and became political elites in various parts of the country and, therefore, had to be incorporated into the normative social order. The fact that these elites patronized Brahmanas indicates that they too swifty fell in line with the king–Brahmana alliance, which was an important long-term element in the Brahmanical ideology of kingship.

It is intriguing that ancient Indian kings generally conducted their wars within the subcontinent, at the most venturing into Afghanistan (in the case of the Mauryas). While armies marched into the subcontinent from the northwest many a time in Indian history, we do

not see the reverse process. The clearly demarcated geographical circumscription of the subcontinent and the fact that it offered a vast sphere for military and political expansion as well as abundant economic resources of various kinds may have been responsible for this. Another intriguing aspect of Indian warfare is that in spite of the long coastline and history of maritime trade, Indian rulers rarely made incursions across the sea. The only exceptions are Samudragupta's claim in the Allahabad *praśasti* to have subdued the island dwellers. In later times, there were conflicts between the southern kingdoms and those of Sri Lanka and the Chola expedition against Srivijaya. But generally, Indian imperial fantasies and campaigns remained land-locked.[275]

It is surprising that ancient India boasts no elaborate, ostentatious monuments of victory analogous, for instance, to the Parthenon, which celebrated the Athenian victory over the Persians. There are hero stones and *satī* stones, but these are small-scale affairs. The heroism of warriors and *satī*s was usually commemorated in images rather than in words engraved on stone. The most flamboyant advertisements of the military achievements of the great kings were expressed in words rather than in images or monuments. The maximum monumentality these words assumed was when they were inscribed on lofty pillars, crowned by capitals.

In recent years, the relationship between the ideas and ideology of war, society, and religion in Indian history has come in for much scrutiny.[276] There is an increasing interest in making cross-cultural comparisons and in identifying the contemporary relevance of ancient ideas, often using the vocabulary of modern international relations. One of the frequently discussed issues is whether or not the ancient Indians had the idea of a just war, which includes *jus ad bellum* (when it is just to go to war) and *jus in bello* (how to conduct a war that has been entered into in a just manner).[277] The western idea of just war includes the following elements: just cause, right intent, net benefit, legitimate authority, last resort, proportionality of means, and right conduct in war. It has been argued that there was a fundamental difference between ancient Indian and medieval and early modern European ideas of the state, violence, and war—more specifically that the ancient "Hindu" sources do not have the idea of sovereignty; they do not distinguish between duels and war, between internal and external enemies, or between public and private violence; that while they have a code of honor in war, they are not interested in the issue

of *jus ad bellum.*[278] On the other hand, it has been suggested that texts such as the *Ramayana* contain all the elements of the modern western idea of a just war.[279] The idea behind this sort of hypothesis is to include "Hindu" thought in global discourses on the ethics of war and peace. But there are problems with both approaches, as they conflate the ideas within one text as "Hindu" or "Indian" and use anachronistic western benchmarks to analyze ancient Indian thought. While comparative analyses can provide interesting insights into cross-cultural perspectives, situating the ethics and approaches toward war in premodern Asian cultures using vocabularies and frameworks drawn from late medieval or early modern Europe can actually hamper the investigation.

It should be apparent by now that there were several ideas of righteous war and victory in ancient India. The epics discuss war at two levels: the higher level (or the mega-level, where the good guys must win), and the nitty-gritty of war, where there is a code of honor that must at times be transgressed in the interests of attaining the higher goal. The righteousness of war is variously connected with rights of primogeniture, with the idea of the dharma of the *varṇas*, with the gods and fate. One of the important contributions of the *Mahabharata* to the discourse on war is the idea that war and all it entails cannot be reduced to a simple formula, whether on the scale of righteousness or any other aspect. The epic idea of dharmic war is very different from Ashoka's idea of *dhamma-vijaya,* which consists in propogating goodness and is completely different from all the other perspectives on war and victory. And although Kautilya explains the righteous victor as one who does not unleash violence on his defeated foe and who fights only for fame, the righteousness or otherwise of war was not a central issue for the proponents of the *artha* view of politics.

Most of the critiques of war in ancient India, except for Ashoka's, appear in texts that ultimately uphold and celebrate the warrior ethic. There is nothing comparable to the anti-heroic statement attributed to the Greek soldier-poet Archilochus, who spoke flippantly of having thrown down his shield in a bush to run away from battle to save his skin, saying that he could always get another shield. The general view is that war was a necessary concomitant of kingship. But even while ultimately upholding the view of the necessity of war, many texts emphasize that it must always be the last resort, after exhausting all the other available options. The *Mahabharata* reveals that even a

righteous war that must be fought brings intense pain to the victors. Ashoka's critique of war is the most radical of all. It does not confine itself to the losses and suffering caused by war to the winners or the losers; it is a universal moral critique based on a moral commitment to nonviolence.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Wilderness

THE ANCIENT GREEKS marveled at the immense size of India, its many rivers and mountains, the fecundity of its land, the variety of its flora and fauna, and its multitude of people and cities. In their descriptions of the country's strange people, customs, and animals, the wild mountain dwellers are singled out for special mention. We hear of the men of Nulo Mountain who have eight-toed feet that turn backward; other mountain men with dog heads who communicate by barking and who subsist on hunting and fowling; and the people of the Kaukasos (Hindu Kush) Mountains, who have sexual intercourse with women in public and eat the bodies of their dead relatives. We are told of the Astomoi who live in the east—men without mouths, who clothe their hairy bodies in leaves of wool and live on the odors of roots, flowers, and wild apples, dying when exposed to stronger smells. And in the farthest part of the mountains, the Greeks tell us, live the Pygmies, small men who face attack by cranes.[1] Such bizarre inventions were part of a long tradition of Greek ethnographic writing about other lands, which aimed not only to inform but also to entertain, and the descriptions of the wild people of India no doubt aimed at exciting wonder and astonishment.[2]

The Greeks were also fascinated by Indian animals. They speak of tigers, lions, huge snakes, winged snakes, and scorpions, fierce dogs, fat-tailed sheep, long-tailed monkeys (the langurs), and the one-horned ass (the rhinoceros).[3] But the animal that made the greatest impact was the elephant, and there are detailed descriptions of its appearance, mating habits, gestation period, diseases, and cures. The Greeks were aware of the phenomenon of "must" when the foreheads of elephants oozed a sticky fluid and the animals became greatly

agitated. They recognized that elephants were used in Indian armies and that victory or defeat in battle depended in no small amount on them.[4] There is detailed description of the technique of elephant capture. Nearchus talks about chariots drawn by elephants and states that an Indian woman feels honored if her lover gifts her this animal. But Megasthenes seems to have asserted that in India, the ownership of horses and elephants was a royal monopoly.[5] As mentioned in Chapter 4, the agreement between Chandragupta Maurya and his Hellenistic counterpart Seleucus involved the Maurya king's receiving the provinces of Arachosia, Gedrosia, and the Paropanisadai in return for five hundred elephants. This underlines the tremendous importance of elephants in wars, negotiations, and treaties at the time.

Greeks writers describe Indian hunting techniques involving kites, eagles, and ravens, as well as the use of fierce dogs used to hunt deer and wild boar.[6] They also describe the royal hunt. Strabo tells us that apart from war, the king moves out of his palace for three reasons: to hear cases in courts, to perform sacrifices, and to hunt.

> A third [type of departure from the palace] is to a sort of Bacchic hunt where women crowd around him in a circle, with the spear bearers outside. The roadway is fenced off, and it is death for anyone to come inside to the women. They are preceded by drum beaters and bell carriers. He [the king] hunts from the enclosures, shooting with a bow from a platform (with two or three armed women standing beside him), and also from an elephant in unfenced hunting preserves. Some of the women ride in chariots, some on horses, and some on elephants, and, as when they join in military expeditions, they are supplied with all kinds of weapons.[7]

The royal hunt was perceived by the Greeks as an integral and important part of ancient Indian kingship, and as we shall see, this perception is confirmed by the Indian sources. What we see in the latter is a stark contrast in attitudes toward the ordinary hunter and the royal hunter. Bones of wild (and domesticated) animals, bearing cut marks indicating that they were killed for food, are routinely found at ancient Indian sites and bear direct testimony to nonvegetarian food habits of many ancient Indians. The hunters, who, over the centuries, provided wild game to feed the inhabitants of cities

and villages were generally described in ancient Indian texts as violent, uncultured, and lowly. On the other hand, the royal hunter, who killed large mammals of the wilderness for sport and in order to demonstrate his great prowess, was usually celebrated.

Thomas T. Allsen argues that all over ancient Eurasia, a steady decline of hunting as a subsistence activity was accompanied by a steady increase in its political importance.[8] The royal hunt was a vital component of many premodern states and was intimately connected with attitudes toward nature, political legitimacy, interstate relations, warfare, administration, and the use and preservation of natural resources. Emphasizing the longevity and the cultural embeddedness of the royal hunt over centuries of Eurasian history, Allsen argues persuasively that its demise in the nineteenth century was the result of the emergence of the modern state.

But we are talking about ancient times, when animals of the wilderness were an important part of cross-cultural interactions. The use of war elephants spread from India to Europe and other parts of Asia, though the western armies used African as well as Asian elephants.[9] In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* ivory and tortoise shell appear on the list of commodities obtained by the Mediterranean world from the East. Wild animals also figured in international trade. They were used in gory Roman public spectacles, such as those held in the Colosseum, where animals fought other animals or gladiators. Exotic animals were especially prized, and we hear of the killing of vast numbers of elephants, bears, ostriches, and large felines in political ceremonials.[10] Some of these animals may have come from India.

Until recent times, large swathes of land in the Indian subcontinent remained under forest cover. Massive deforestation really took off after the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of population increase, commercial farming, and the expansion of the railways.[11] This chapter discusses the complex relationship between the state and the wilderness and its inhabitants—humans and animals—during circa 600 BCE-600 CE, a relationship fraught with exploitation and violence. It includes a detailed discussion of the royal hunt, which, as will be shown, was an important political act. After examining early archaeological and textual evidence and certain influential Brahmanical ideas, the discussion focuses sequentially on representations of the wilderness in Buddhist texts, Ashoka's inscriptions, the epics, political treatises, *kāvya,* and coins,

maintaining an internal chronological sequence within the sections, wherever needed. Although “wilderness” has wider connotations than “forest,” the two words are used more or less synonymously in this chapter as generic terms including a variety of habitats including woods, grasslands, scrub, and wastelands, which lay outside the agrarian villages and cities of the plains.

Early Archaeological and Textual Perspectives

Most histories of India focus on the expansion of agriculture, cities and kingdoms and ignore five facts. The first is that over the centuries, the expansion of agriculture and the domestication of animals led to a diminution, but not an extinction, of hunting and gathering as a mode of subsistence and way of life. Second, the worlds of the hunter-gatherers, farmers, and city folk were usually connected through a series of symbiotic relationships. Third, the great empires and kingdoms of ancient India coexisted with vast forest tracts where the writ of the state did not run smoothly or run at all. Fourth, violence and the threat of violence against the inhabitants of the forest were inherent in the expansion of agriculture, cities, and states. Fifth, the ostentatious killing of the powerful animals of the wild was an important aspect of ancient Indian kingship.

There are no statistics. We do not know how many men perished in battles between forest tribals and state armies. There is no body count of the wild animals killed as trophies by ancient kings. But the importance of these largely undocumented events in political history and political thought must not be underestimated. In order to understand the place of the forest as a site of conflict and violence in ancient Indian political thought, it is necessary to examine the many facets of the complex relationship between the state and the forest, situating these within the diverse cultural meanings of the forest, animals, and hunting in ancient Indian life and thought.

Ancient and modern physical environments of South Asia present great diversity and change over time. The Harappan civilization, the first urban culture of the subcontinent, had a rich and diverse resource base that included riverine plains, forests, grasslands, plateaus, and coastal stretches. Animal bones, including those of the deer, pig, boar, sheep, goat, pig, tortoise, and fish are found at Harappan sites, indicate that apart from agriculture and cattle rearing, the subsistence activities of these people included hunting and fishing. Small quantities of horse, elephant, and rhinoceros bones have also been found. The animals that had the greatest symbolic religious and political significance for the Harappans were not those which they ate or used regularly; they were either wild or imaginary. The wild animals represented frequently and in a naturalistic manner on

Harappan seals include the humped bull, elephant, tiger, and rhinoceros. The lion is rare; there is a terracotta with two lion heads, but this animal does not appear on seals. The tiger features in scenes of man–animal combat. There are also composite creatures such as the tiger-human, bull-elephant, and ram-bull-elephant. Among the fantastic animals, the one-horned "unicorn" stands out.

The depiction of such animals in front of some sort of altar suggests a religious significance. A seal showing a seated figure with a buffalo-horn headdress, flanked by an elephant, rhinoceros, water buffalo, and tiger, seems to represent a god associated with wild animals. Some of the animals on Harappan seals may have been symbols of powerful clans, elites, or rulers. The "unicorn"—found in large numbers at the major city sites—may have been such a political symbol, but it is also possible that the Harappan rulers were represented by the *less* frequently represented animals. The fact that the Harappan script has not been read makes it difficult to reach very definite conclusions, but there is no doubt that animals, especially the elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, bull, and "unicorn," dominated the religious and symbolic systems of the Harappans.

The earliest textual references to ancient landscapes combine specificity with a generalizing tendency. In many early Sanskrit sources, the settlement—village (*grāma*) or city (*nagara*)—on the one hand, and the wilderness (*vana, araṇya*), on the other, are distinguished from each other and presented as polar opposites; but at the same time, they are recognized as being closely connected. *Vana* (the forest) can be understood as a type of *araṇya* (wilderness), but the words are often used interchangeably.[12] There were also intermediate zones—gardens, game parks, pasturelands, and wastelands—that were physically and conceptually located between the settlement and the wilderness. Apart from the settlement–wilderness dichotomy, another important one was between dry land (*jāṅgala*) and wet / marshy land (*ānūpa*), which became a basis for classifying flora and fauna in the medical treatises.[13] This is also found in texts such as the *Arthashastra,* which, however, work out a much more detailed ecological classification of space depending on resource potential and use. In later centuries, land-grant inscriptions introduced new ways of conceptualizing space in the context of official property-related transactions.

The Sangam poetry of South India expresses yet another imagination of the landscape. The classical Tamil love poems connect

specific themes with five landscapes known as *tinai.* The *kurinchi,* or the mountain landscape, is associated with the union of lovers; *palai,* or the arid terrain, with separation; *mullai,* or pastoral tracts, with patient waiting; *neytal,* or the seashore, with pining; and *marutam,* or riverine tracts, with sulking. It is interesting that although many of these poems must have been composed in an urban setting, they evoke natural landscapes, several of which could have potentially included the wilderness. Vivid descriptions of cities and city life occur in the fifth- / sixth-century epics, the *Shilappadikaram* and *Manimekalai,* by when the cityscape had captured the Tamil literary imagination.

There was never *an* ancient Indian attitude toward the wilderness. Different classificatory systems and perceptions coexisted, and they changed over time. Sometimes a single text reflects a multitude of ideas, even if some are more dominant than others. The wilderness was a paradisical place of exquisite natural beauty. It was an unpredictable place inhabited by fierce and belligerent tribes. It was an abode of ugly, frightening demons. It was a place of involuntary and unhappy exile from the world of power and pleasure. It was an ideal place for the release from the burden of worldly existence. In exploring the forest as a site of political conflict, killing, and violence, we have to understand all the other things that it was and was not. In doing so, we are taken to the heart of ancient Indian political processes, to fundamental ideas about political and cultural identity, and to the definition of the self and the other.

The Wilderness in the Early Brahmanical Tradition

The distinction between the settlement (*grāma*) and wilderness (*araṇya*), which became common in later Vedic texts, occurs only once in the *Rig Veda*.[14] Stephanie Jamison has pointed out that while the *Rig Veda* is permeated with references to domesticated animals, there seems to be a deliberate ignoring of wild ones, including imposing mammals such as the lion, tiger, and bear. She attributes the sudden prominence of wild animals in the middle and late Vedic texts not only to increasing familiarity with these animals but also to the increasing importance of Kshatriya and royal ritual.

The performance of sacrifices was central to Vedic religion, and sacrifice was associated with the settlement. It has been suggested that the great royal sacrifices such as the *rājasuya* represent a reform and restructuring of an older kind of ritual, an ironing out of a cyclical oscillation of the king between the settlement and the wilderness.[15] The sacrifice, according to Charles Malamoud, demarcated the spheres of the village and the forest. It protected the village from the forest; it asserted the superiority of the village and drew the forest into its orbit by propitiating and encompassing it.[16] The sacrificial fires could be established only by the householder, who lived in the village. While most of the oblation material could be obtained from village or forest, the sacrificial animals were supposed to belong to the village. Animals of both the village and the forest participated in the grand horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*), but those of the forest were not killed; they were set free. The explanation is that they were not supposed to be subject to violence.

Although wild animals were not to be sacrificed, they did play a significant role in certain sacrifices. For instance, the hair of a wolf, lion, and tiger were to be put into a preparation of spirituous liquor in the Sautramani sacrifice.[17] Wild animals were also part of certain sacrifices that were connected specially with kingship. For instance, walking on a tiger skin was a part of the royal consecration; the king sat on a throne placed on a tiger skin, and the anointing mixture was to be rubbed in with the horn of a black antelope.[18]

The classification of animals in the Veda was based on several overlapping criteria: domesticated (*grāmya*) and wild (*āraṇya*); those that could be sacrificed and those that could not; those that could be

eaten and those that could not.[19] There were also anatomical criteria. These included the distinction between two-footed (*dvipada*) and four-footed (*catuśpada*) animals. Another distinction was based on the nature of the foot—whether it was five-clawed (for instance, in the case of humans), whole-hoofed (horses and asses), or cloven-hoofed (cows, goats, sheep). Yet another basis of distinction was dental structure, between animals that had incisors only in the lower jaw (cattle, goat, sheep) or in both jaws (humans, horses, asses). Animals were also distinguished on the basis of the mode of procreation, between those born from an egg, embryonic sac, moisture (mosquitoes, gnats, lice, flies, maggots, etc.), or sprouts (this actually applies to plants). When the various classificatory criteria are considered simultaneously, the following binary opposition emerges: village / sacrificial / edible versus forest / nonsacrificial / inedible.[20]

Where do humans figure in these classifications of the animal world? In places, they are considered domesticated animals (*paśu*), the preeminent among them, and therefore the preeminent of all potential animal victims of sacrifice. And yet, in other places, the human being figures in lists of forest animals. While various physiological differences are mentioned (for instance, bare skin), the most important cultural difference that distinguishes him from other animals is the fact that he is the only animal that can be both sacrificer and (theoretically) sacrificed.[21]

While the wilderness was not generally a suitable place for sacrifice, it *was* considered an appropriate place for contemplation. This is suggested by the name of the Aranyaka texts, which, among other things, contain symbolic and philosophical interpretations of sacrificial ritual. The philosophical debates of the Upanishads seem to reflect a transitional stage oscillating between villages and royal courts.[22]

During the period of the transition of tribes toward statehood, Vedic texts differentiate between communities on linguistic, religious, and cultural grounds. The primary cultural dichotomy and conflict was between the *āryas* and the *dasyus*. The *āryas* saw themselves as cultured, civilized people. The *dasyus* included specific tribes such as the Kiratas, Andhras, Pulindas, and Mutibas. The cultural axis intersected with a geographical one, but both moved along with the eastward expansion of Brahmanical culture. However, political conflicts crisscrossed the *ārya–dasyu* divide. It was left to the Brahmanical ideologues of succeeding centuries to construct a more

systematic ritual and cultural geography of the subcontinent, which defined incorporation, subordination, and exclusion in more complex ways.

With the advent of cities and states, the settlement–wilderness dichotomy expanded into a tripartite relationship between village, city, and forest. The perception of cultural contrast between settlement and forest sharpened. The image of the wild forest tribal became more strongly etched in terms of a contrast with the urbane, cultured city dweller, but there was an increasing recognition of the interdependence of their locales. This was accompanied by a heightened awareness of the political conflict between the forest and the kingdom.

The epics and the Puranas blend cosmography with geography. They visualize the earth as consisting of seven concentric islands separated by seas of salt water, molasses, wine, butter, curd, milk, and fresh water. The island in the center is called Jambudvipa, in the middle of which lies the land of Bharatavarsha, with the golden Meru Mountain rising tall from its center. So far, we are in the realm of mythical geography, but this veers into mention of specific mountains, rivers, and places, showing a familiarity with the geography of the subcontinent. The descriptions of the landscape and places of pilgrimage indicate that the epics and Puranas had a sense of the subcontinent as a geographical, political, and cultural macro-region, and simultaneously recognized diversities and divisions within it. The basic classification was in terms of the cardinal directions—the northern, southern, eastern, and western divisions—but the category of the Vindhyavasins (the people who live in the Vindhya Mountains) recognizes the mountain tribes of central India as a separate cultural and political entity.

The idea of Aryavarta (land of the *āryas*) attempted to pin down Brahmanical ideology to the landscape. But the frontier of Aryavarta, like the geographical awareness of its ideologues, was a constantly shifting one. The *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* defines Aryavarta as the land between the Ganga and the Yamuna. The *Manusmriti,* on the other hand, states that it includes the whole of northern India between the Himalayas and Vindhyas, bounded on both sides by the ocean. A third definition, which occurs in many Smritis, is that Aryavarta is the land where the black antelope roams. The black antelope, an animal found only in the subcontinent, is closely associated with sacrifice and the Brahmana *varṇa.* What we have here is an interesting correlation

between the natural habitat of a wild animal and cultural space. There is also a social dimension to the term "Aryavarta," which is clear from the fact that the *Vishnu Dharmasutra* describes it as the land where the social order of the four *varṇas* is established. Going to the lands of people of "mixed-origin," which included various eastern as well as western lands, required ritual purification through the performance of sacrifice or expiatory rites.[23]

While the idea of Aryavarta suggests a potential spatial incorporation of the forest people into an expanding Brahmanical universe, the idea of the *mleccha* (often translated as barbarian) indicates their cultural segregation. This term, with its pejorative connotations, has a long history in the Indian cultural vocabulary from later Vedic texts onward, and was used over many centuries as an umbrella term for tribals as well as foreigners.[24] As we have seen in Chapter 4, it could also expand to include various other subcontinental political adversaries. The *Vishnu Dharmasutra* asserts that the land where the order of the four *varṇas* is not established is the land of the *mlecchas*. The word *dasyu* also had connotations of the barbarian, and was often used in ancient texts in a similar sense. These categories were not confined to the Brahmanical tradition, but are also found in Buddhist and Jaina texts. Although expressed in geographical terms (even if often vague and ambiguous), the border between Aryavarta and *mleccha* country could not be a neat, spatial one. It was a moving cultural and political border, and, as we shall see, there were *mlecchas* within Aryavarta as well.

In Vedic tribal society, political distinctions were based on tribe, speech, and cultural affinity. With the emergence of the state in the early historic period, texts started differentiating between polities on the basis of the nature of their organization of political power, distinguishing kingdoms from oligarchies and modest kingdoms from great ones (*mahājanapadas*). The story of the sixteen great states of early historic India was presented as a struggle among various monarchies and oligarchies. As the latter were systematically defeated or marginalized, this narrative was replaced by a story of conflicts and alliances among monarchical states. Most of the Puranas describe their contents as having been narrated by a bard to the sages in the Naimisha forest in the course of a twelve-year-long sacrifice. But while they retained the forest as a locale for narration, in presenting what they considered the most significant aspects of political history of the dynasties of the "Kali age" (this goes up to the age of the Guptas), the

Puranas completely ignore the forest chiefs, who must have been important participants in the violent political struggles over the centuries.

The forest chieftains were not considered part of the circle of kings by the political theorists, but they were recognized as a generic political force that kings had to deal with. The ultimate triumph of monarchy and empire involved the destruction of the oligarchies and the partial subjugation of the forest tribes. Along the way, the latter became recognized not only as cultural others, but also as political adversaries as well as potential allies, although usually of an inferior kind.

How does the forest figure in the classical *varṇa* and *āśrama* schemes—the two resilient theoretical axes of the ideal Brahmanical society? Some sections of all the four *varṇa*s had *potential* association with the forest. Brahmana sages could presumably live in *āśrama*s in the forest; Kshatriya warriors could have occasions to battle against forest chieftains; Vaishyas could include foresters turned into farmers and animal herders; and Shudras could include menial workers associated with the forest or its produce. Interestingly, hunting and fishing are not part of the job description of any of the four *varṇa*s, not even the Shudras. The implication is that these activities do not form part of the hierarchy of approved vocations.

However, many different groups associated with the forest tribes or with hunting and fishing *do* figure in lists of occupations and discussion of inter-*varṇa* unions, and there is also an attempt to account for the origins of specific tribes.[25] The *Aitareya Brahmana* describes certain tribes as the offspring of the sage Vishvamitra.[26] We are told that when his fifty sons refused to accept Shunahshepa as his son, the sage cursed them so that they became the Andhras, Pundras, Shabaras, Pulindas, and Mutibas. These are the names of ancient tribes. The violent conflicts that underlay the Brahmanical incorporation and subordination of the forest tribes have to be inferred from such mythical accounts.

The tribal group singled out for special mention in the Brahmanical texts, and no doubt a political force to be reckoned with, are the Nishadas, who, as we have already noted, appear in epic-Puranic accounts about the origins of kingship. They are usually spoken of in derogatory terms and are placed beyond the pale of the four *varṇa*s. The *Manusmriti* explains the Parashava (which seems to be another name for the Nishada) as “one who, though living, is like a corpse”

and associates these people with hunting and fishing. It also gives two accounts of the origin of the Nishadas: They are described as a product of the union between a Brahmana man and Shudra woman and as Kshatriyas who were degraded due to their nonperformance of the Vedic life-cycle rituals and a lack of contact with Brahmanas. There is also an interesting reference to the Nishada Brahmana—a Brahmana who has the characteristics of a Nishada: He is a thief, back-biter, and loves to eat meat and fish.[27]

Although the forest does not figure directly in the *varṇa* scheme (except for defining those who lie outside it), it makes a marginal appearance in the idea of the four life stages, or *āśramas*. The celibate student (*brahmacārin*) is visualized as living in his guru's home, but he occasionally goes into the wilderness to recite sacred verses.[28] The householder (*gṛhastha*) lives in a settlement and seems to have little to do with the forest. The renunciant (*saṁnyāsin*) can live in different locations including outside the village, under a tree, in a cave, on the banks of a river, in a hermitage, or in a burial ground, but the fact that he subsists on begging means that he does not live too far from a settlement. The emphasis is less on where he should live and more on his being homeless and wandering alone.[29]

Of the four *āśramas*, it is the third—*vānaprastha* (literally, "going to the forest")—that is most closely associated with the forest and forest life. This is the stage of partial renunciation, which is supposed to be lived in the forest. The *vānaprastha*'s wife could accompany him to the forest, and he was expected to perform sacrifices (as well as the five great sacrifices) there. He was to wear tattered clothes made of material such as bark, *kusha* grass, or deer skin and was supposed to let his hair and nails grow long. His frugal daily regimen involved subsistence on forest flowers, fruits, roots, vegetables, or wild grain. These could be supplemented by begging for alms in villages or hermitages. The *vānaprastha* was supposed to study the sacred texts and perform austerities in order to realize the highest goal—*brahman*. Compassion was one of the virtues prescribed for him. If suffering from an incurable disease, he was permitted to commit ritual suicide. Although there are some similarities between the regimen of the *vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsin,* especially with respect to the control of the senses, regulation of food intake, and contemplation of the higher reality, there were several significant differences. The *vānaprastha* was supposed to separate himself physically and mentally from worldly life, but his separation was not as complete as that of the *saṁnyāsin*.

Although the early texts distinguish between the idea of the *vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsin,* the former gradually merged with the latter and faded in importance, so much so, that *vānaprastha* came to be described as one of the various practices that were forbidden in the Kali age.[30] With its decline, the idea of a life stage that was to be spent in the forest also faded away.

Buddhist Perspectives

Given its emphasis on nonviolence, it is not surprising that the attitude of early Buddhism toward groups that subsisted on hunting was not a positive one. The Kshatriyas and Brahmanas (in that order) are included among the high social groups (*ukaṭṭa jātis*), and "untouchables" and tribals are included among the low social groups (*hīna jātis*).[31] Right from its inception, the Buddhist order had strong links with urban and royal groups. The Buddha and his monks were itinerant, moving from city to city. In course of time, when permanent monasteries emerged, many of them were located in or near cities. This pattern of location reflects the close relationship between the sangha and the laity. Buddhism and Jainism in fact brought renunciation out of the isolation of the forest into the city. The Indian situation contrasts with Sri Lanka, where, parallel to the large and often opulent monastic centers, there was a long tradition of forest monks who led a life of great austerity, devoted to solitary meditation in caves or simple structures in the wilderness.

And yet, even though Buddhist and Jaina monks and nuns moved in and out of cities and villages, the forest retained its strong *conceptual* associations with renunciation. Even though monasteries had made their appearance, the *idea* of the forest renunciant still had enormous power. The confessional ritual of the Buddhist Mulasarvastivadin sect states:

> Happy is the condition of those learned ones who have made fixed intentions and subdued their senses;
>
> (Happy is the condition) of those gone to old age in peaceful forests, of those having spent their youthfulness in forests.[32]

At the same time, the forest was also seen as a place of danger. In its discussion of the offenses that required confession (the *pratideśanīyas*), the confessional ritual of the Mulasarvastivadin sect states:

> There are forest dwellings which are considered by the *saṁgha* to be doubtful, dangerous, and fearful. Whatever monk, in such

> forest dwellings which are considered by the *saṁgha* to be doubtful, dangerous, and fearful, being previously unawares, should chew on or consume hard food and soft food in the forest outside of the *ārāma* [monastery], that should be confessed in the presence of the monks by that monk.[33]

Let us look closely at the representations of the forest in two important Buddhist sources—Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita* and the *Jataka,* and then move on to examine the attitudes toward the forest in Ashoka's inscriptions.

Forest and Grove in the Buddhacharita

Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita* contains a Buddhist remolding of Brahmanical ideas associated with the forest. Ashvaghosha recognizes a forest–city dichotomy. In the same vein as the *Ramayana*'s description of Ayodhya after the departure of Rama, we are told that without Sarvarthasiddha, the city (*pura*) of Kapilavastu was like a forest (*vana*), and the forest had become like a city. Ashvaghosha associates the forest exclusively with renunciation, austerities, spiritual quest, and the hermitages of sages. "Going to the forest" means renouncing the world; that is why the forest is described as a "workshop of dharma" (*dharmasya karmānta*). And as noted in Chapter 2, the *Buddhacarita* gives us one of the most detailed, even if somewhat idealized, descriptions of the forest hermitages and the practices of their inhabitants. While the capital city and the forest are two major locales in the story, it is significant just how much of the action takes place in the latter. This is not surprising, given the fact that renunciation is such an important theme in the work.

In the *Buddhacharita, vana* and *araṇya* usually mean forest, but *vana* also refers to other kinds of spaces. Along with *kānana* and *udyāna,* it is used for pleasure gardens or parks—manicured spaces, with pavilions and ponds. In Ashvaghosha's rendering of the Buddha's life story, these spaces are not only important in themselves. The prince's disenchantment with his life of sensual indulgence begins with his hearing songs about lovely groves and city parks that were much loved by women. In order to satisfy his son's desire to visit such a grove, the king arranges for a pleasure trip (*vihāra-yātrā*), and takes the precaution of sanitizing the royal highway by removing all unpleasant sights from it. But the pleasure trip turns into one that inspires fear and horror when the young prince sees an old man. And worse is in store when, instead of heeding the prince's instructions to turn back, the charioteer drives on to a garden called Padmashanda-vana. Sarvarthasiddha is forcibly led into this pleasure garden thronging with women, and this forms the setting for an elaborate (but unsuccessful) seduction scene described in great detail. Ashvaghosha turns the pleasure grove into a place a where the prince is assailed by the pleasures of the senses and remains unmoved by them.

A subsequent journey to the forest (*vana-bhūmi*) has even more

momentous results. Riding on his horse Kanthaka, the prince is drawn deep into the forest, where he sees the earth being ploughed.[34] The violence and pathos of the scene of men and oxen toiling in the sun and insects and other creatures lying dead on the ground fill Sarvarthasiddha with intense pity and compassion.

> Getting down from the horse, then, he began to pace
> slowly across that land, deeply engulfed by grief,
> reflecting on the birth and death of all creatures;
> and deeply anguished, he cried out:
> "How wretched, indeed, is this world!"[35]

The prince commands his companions to leave him. At the foot of a rose apple tree, he embarks on the path of mental stillness. He sees a god in the form of a mendicant and resolves to leave his worldly life. As we have seen, his quest for truth takes him to many hermitages in the forest. So the forest plays a very critical role in the story of the Buddha's life as narrated by Ashvaghosha. It is the locale of renunciation, contemplation, and realization, removed from and preferred to the world of kings and courts.

The Jataka stories reflect a significant expansion in the portrayal of the forest and a close relationship between its animals and kingship. The forest becomes an arena for events and conflicts that lead to the generation of religious, moral, and political norms and instruction. As mentioned in Chapter 2, wild animals are important protagonists in several Jatakas, and many of the stories seem to be popular animal fables with a Buddhist frame and moral grafted onto them.

Most of the Jataka animals live in the wilderness.[36] The ones that occur most frequently are monkeys, elephants, jackals, lions, and deer. Many other mammals, along with birds, snakes, reptiles, amphibians, rodents, insects, and mythical animals feature in the cast of characters.[37] The animal world with its endless variety was especially suited for a graphic presentation of a variety of moral and political themes. As we have seen, in the Jatakas, not only do animals on several occasions instruct humans in exemplary behavior, but the bodhisattva—the Buddha-to-be—frequently appears as an animal, sometimes as the king of his species. The animals of these stories have human-like emotions, cognition, and rationality. They also have great potential for spiritual progress and attainment. There is an idea of the innate nature and characteristics of different species, but sometimes we see reversals. For instance, some stories reflect the idea of natural enmity, such as that between snakes and the *garuḍa* or between the mongoose and snake.[38] But in other stories, natural enmity is overcome and replaced by friendship. A recognition of the moral and political potential of animals was a prerequisite for the stories to be considered credible vehicles for the transmission of moral and political norms. Apart from human emotions and intelligence, animals in the Jatakas also have a social and political community. It is this that allows the stories to offer templates for a discourse on human society and polity. Kingship, violence, and nonviolence are central to this discourse.

The descriptions of animal bodhisattvas emphasize their unusual physical beauty and extraordinary moral qualities. The elephant features in many stories, the most important of which is the Chhaddanta Jataka, which has been discussed in Chapter 2. The physical description of the elephant bodhisattvas focuses on their unusual and magnificent physical form; Chhaddanta, for instance, is a

splendid elephant with six tusks. But more important is the fact that these animals are shown as possessing great capacity for moral progress and a strong sense of friendship, loyalty, and gratitude. They are also endowed with a strong sense of justice and a predilection toward nonviolence and compassion. For instance, in one story, elephants refuse to trample to death a man falsely accused of a crime.[39]

As in the *Panchatantra,* there is an element of realism in the portrayal of the relative strength of animals, something that weaker animals with illusions of grandeur sometimes discover to their detriment. A jackal who thinks he is as strong as a lion and tries to kill one is himself killed. A drunken beetle takes on an elephant and is naturally crushed. But as in the *Panchatantra,* in the Jatakas, too, we sometimes see the small and apparently weak overcoming the large and apparently strong through the use of courage, intellect, and strategy. This is how a brave dwarf fights and overcomes a cowardly giant.

Certain Jataka stories emphasize that animals are not to be killed in hunting or in sacrifice. They should be treated with respect and compassion (the animals themselves often appear as spokespersons for this cause), and this yields rich rewards. A hermit provides water for animals of the forest in time of drought. When he is in need, out of gratitude, they in turn provide him with regular fruits for subsistence.[40] In a story involving the royal hunt, a king chases a stag and falls into a pit while doing so; he is rescued from the pit by that very stag.[41]

The Nigrodhamiga Jataka contains a critique of the royal hunt and connects true leadership with compassion.[42] King Brahmadatta, fond of hunting and eating deer meat, hunts every day and causes disturbance to the people of his kingdom. The latter decide to drive a large number of deer into the royal park and provide them with adequate water and food so that the king would confine himself to hunting in that place. At that time, the bodhisattva was born as a magnificent golden deer, with silvery horns and eyes like round jewels. He lived in the forest attended by five hundred deer and was known as Banyan Deer. In his vicinity lived another golden deer named Branch Deer, who also had a herd of five hundred attendants. The king hunted in the royal park but gave personal immunity to Banyan Deer and Branch Deer on account of their beauty. These two deer saw their herds being wounded and killed regularly and decided

on the following arrangement: Every day, a deer from their herds would alternately present itself for slaughter to the king. Under this arrangement, only one deer was killed each day.

One day, it was the turn of a pregnant doe to present herself for slaughter. She pleaded to Branch Deer to pass over her, but to no avail. When she approached Banyan Deer, he decided to present himself in her place and proceeded to lay his head on the block. The royal cook informed the king, who rushed to the spot and announced that the lives of Banyan Deer and the pregnant does would be spared. But Banyan Deer insisted that the king should spare not only their lives but those of all the four-footed animals, birds, and fish in the park. The great deer then gave a lecture to the king, urging him to rule righteously and justly, so that he attained heaven.

The deer of the forest, now freed from the danger of being killed by humans, started eating men's crops. The men assembled and complained to the king that his boon was causing them great harm. The king refused to withdraw his immunity to the animals, saying that he would rather give up his kingdom than break his promise. When Banyan Deer heard of this, he summoned his herd and forbade them from eating men's crops. He announced that it was no longer necessary for farmers to fence their fields and that it would suffice if they marked their land with tied-up leaves. Banyan Deer had proved his great compassion and concern for all living beings, had lectured to a great king on righteous rule, and had adroitly negotiated a way out of a problematic man-animal conflict. The king and all deer obeyed his command and teaching. At the conclusion of the story, the Buddha reveals that he himself was Banyan Deer in a previous birth.

Not surprising for stories where nonviolence toward animals is privileged and the bodhisattva himself is often an animal, hunters and fowlers are seen as transgressors and perpetrators of violence. There are Jataka stories where animals are trapped or killed by hunters, but there are others where the animals free and save themselves through their intelligence, ingenuity, or quick thinking. Hunters are, on occasion, transformed due to their encounter with the bodhisattva. For instance, in the Hamsa Jataka, the queen of Banaras has a dream and craves to see a golden goose discourse on the dhamma.[43] The bodhisattva had been born as a golden goose named Dhatarattha, king of the wild geese, and lived on mount Chitrakuta. The king sends off a hunter to trap the beautiful bird. The golden goose is trapped in a snare; he urges his captain Sumukha to fly away, but the latter refuses

to abandon him out of loyalty and flies up to the hunter and recites the virtues of his master. The hunter is impressed with them both and thinks:

> If I should harm virtuous creatures like these, the earth would gape up and swallow me up. What care I for the king's reward? I will set them free.[44]

Does the strong emphasis on freedom have metaphysical or political overtones? It is difficult to say.

Given the popularity of the Jataka stories and the fact that they are represented in sculpture at many a Buddhist site, the connections that many of them established between kingship, Buddhahood, the animals of the wilderness, and nonviolence must have had an important impact. The art of sites such as Sanchi and Bharhut throngs with exuberant depictions of plants, trees, and animals. Animals occur in representations of Jataka stories (identified by name at Bharhut) and as part of the general ornamental design. Apart from elephants, horses, monkeys, snakes, deer, bulls, horses, birds, and others, there are also fantastic animals such as the part human, part animal *kiṁnaras*. In early Buddhist art, flora and fauna are not part of the background of human action, but an intrinsic part of it. Forest people also occasionally appear in the relief sculptures. Tribal couples occur at several places at Sanchi, with bows in their hands and feathers in their hair. One of the most interesting scenes found at Bharhut, shows forest people chiseling a cave, dressed in skirts made of leaves, with feathers in their hair, and baskets strapped to their backs.[45]

The forest and forest dwellers also feature in the Ajanta paintings. For instance, in Cave 17, we encounter a tribal couple in the visual narration of the Chhaddanta Jataka. The man wears a loincloth and carries a small bow with arrows and a dagger; his wife wears a beaded belt and leaf around her waist; they are accompanied by jackals and scavenger birds and are looking at the carcass of an elephant.[46] Another painting in the same cave tells the story of king Sarvadada, which is a later variant on the Shibi Jataka. In this version of the story, a dove about to be killed by a hunter turns to the king for help. The tribal hunter, dark-skinned, thick-featured, wearing a loin cloth and carrying a small bow and net, stands in court next to a person who seems to be a Brahmana minister. Tribal couples occur often in

the Ajanta landscapes. They are not identical—their appearance and attire vary—but they always carry a bow. Monika Zin suggests that the people of the mountains, forests, and caves were considered to be genii and were seen as integral to the paradisical landscape that separated the sacred space from the profane. On the other hand, the forest and forest people may just have been an important part of the life and imagination of the Ajanta artists. The crucial point is that the people of the forest and the mountains do appear in Indian art. We just have to look for them.

As we have already seen in Chapter 3, in the *Panchatantra,* the forest is an arena for the generation of political instruction for humans, and wild animals are the chief protagonists (though they represent easily identifiable human "types"). But the pragmatic, cynical, and worldly-wise instructions of the *Panchatantra* are very different from the pious ethical teachings of the Jataka which emphasizes nonviolence and compassion.

Ashoka: Tyrant King or First Conservator of Nature?

How did Buddhist ideas of nonviolence impinge on Ashoka's policy toward the forest? As we have seen, *ahiṁsā* and compassion are important aspects of the dhamma that the king talks obsessively about in his inscriptions. Interestingly, Ashoka's dhamma discourses express more sensitivity and compassion toward the animals that inhabit the forest than toward the forest tribals.

The fact that the king addresses the forest people directly in rock edict 13 indicates that he considered them part of his political and dhammic constituency. (It is another matter that they would probably not have been able to read his words.) As mentioned earlier, this edict talks sensitively and movingly about the violence of war but threatens the use of force against recalcitrant forest people and / or their chieftains (*aṭavi*).[47] The description of the Kalinga campaign and the reflections and arguments about the universal suffering caused by war are followed by a change of tone from pathos to warning, ironically just after a statement about forgiveness. The king says that even in the case of one who wrongs him, that which can be forgiven should be forgiven. He goes on to assert that his exhortations (to follow dhamma) extend even to the forest people living in his domain.

> And even the forest people who live within the dominion of Devanampiya, even them he conciliates and urges to reflect. And they are told of the power that Devanampiya has in spite of his remorse [because of the Kalinga war] so that they may turn away from their crimes and may not be killed. For Devanampiya desires for all beings freedom from injury, self-restraint, impartiality and kindness.[48]

What are the evil ways and violent crimes of the forest people alluded to here? It could be the killing of animals, but given the theme of the inscription, it is more likely that it refers to resisting the Maurya state. Implicit in these words are the ideas of the violent and uncontrolled nature *of* the forest people and the violence that will, if necessary, be unleashed *against* them by the Maurya state if they do not turn away from violence. The edict suggests a two-pronged policy of the Ashokan state toward the forest people: conciliation and

persuasion on the one hand and the threat of force on the other.

The attitude toward the forest people forms an important caveat to Ashoka's espousal of the principle of nonviolence. The fact that the warning to the forest people appears in an inscription that deals with the evils of warfare and the replacement of the goal of military victory by that of dhammic victory suggests that the armed insurgency of the forest people posed a major political challenge to the Maurya state, one that could not be ignored even by an otherwise pacifist emperor. The king who repents on the devastation of war, declares that he has abjured it, and urges his successors to do likewise, brandishes his power in front of the forest people and warns them to fall in line if they want to avoid his wrath. Having made this threat, rock edict 13 resumes its benign tone, talking about Ashoka having achieved *dhamma-vijaya* in the domains of many kings. But it is clear that he had not achieved this victory in the forest areas and that he knew this.

Animals as Emblems of Empire and Dhamma

Apart from words, Ashoka's ideas of empire and dhamma are also expressed visually in the form of the animals—the lion, elephant, and humped bull—that crown his pillars.[49] Insofar as Ashokan pillars may have symbolized the center of the universe, it is all the more significant that they are crowned by animals. The lion (one at Vaishali, and four sitting back to back at Sarnath and Sanchi), bull, or elephant surmount the pillars. The elephant is also carved and / or mentioned on the Kalsi and Girnar rocks, which carry sets of major rock edicts. Other motifs associated with the Ashokan pillars are the lotus (associated with purity and fecundity), wheel (symbolizing, among many other things, righteousness), horse, and geese. These emblems had a deep resonance in Indian religious and cultural traditions over the centuries, cutting across sectarian divides.[50] The lion, bull, and elephant constitute a set of striking multivalent symbols carefully chosen for the proclamation of Ashoka's imperial power and dhamma.

These three magnificent animals include the wild and the tamed and represent a range of animal types with which humans have forged very different kinds of relationships over time. The lion is associated exclusively with the wild (although attempts to tame lions have been made throughout history). The humped bull is considered domesticated, but is quite wild and unruly even in that state. Further, feral bulls may have roamed in the wild. The elephant is both wild and potentially semitamed and has great military importance. The elephant and bull are herbivores, while the lion is a carnivore. Not only do the lion, elephant and bull figure on Ashokan pillar capitals; they also occur on punch-marked coins of early historic India as well as on Maurya and post-Maurya ring stones and disc stones.

All three animals are connected with kingship and much more in many ancient cultures. The bull had astronomical significance and was a symbol of virility and fertility. The natural habitat of the Asiatic lion, a highly endangered species which is today found only in the Gir forest of Gujarat in western India, once extended from West Asia to eastern India.[51] This animal had astronomical importance, and was a solar symbol in ancient Egypt, where it was worshipped, hunted, and tamed by the Egyptian pharaohs. In Assyria, we hear of the havoc caused by lions to people and herds, and Assyrian art depicts tame

lions, lions attacking bulls, lion hunts, and king–lion combat. Lions were intimately connected kingship in sixth- and fifth- century BCE Persia, too, where the Achaemenid kings engaged in lion hunts and lion-taming.

As we have seen, the humped bull and elephant occur often in the Harappan context, but the lion is rare or nonexistent. The bull is evoked frequently in the *Rig Veda,* and the animal is associated with strength and virility over the centuries. Nandi, a humped bull, is the mount of the Hindu god Shiva. The idea of the lion as king of wild animals goes back to later Vedic texts and is found in the epics, although the lion shares space with the tiger in this role.[52] Later Vedic texts mention the elephant both as a royal mount and as an item of royal gifts.[53] With the development of kingdoms and political discourse, the lion, along with other animals such as the bull, tiger, and elephant, increasingly figured in analogies and associations with kingship. Apart from, and perhaps because of, its connection with royalty, the lion had religious associations as well. The Buddha is known as Shakyasimha (lion of the Shakyas), and Mahavira is associated with the lion emblem. In the epics, kings and warriors are frequently compared with lions, tigers, and bulls. The idea of the king's lion throne (*siṁhāsana*) occurs from the *Mahabharata* onward. But it is only from the Maurya period that the lion becomes a major royal symbol in India. Its majestic size and appearance, mane and roar set this animal apart from all other animals. Further, Divyabhanusinh points out, given its preference for grasslands, the lion allows himself to be seen as the king of the animal world, in contrast to the tiger, who moves around in thick forests.[54]

The four lions seated back to back on Ashoka's Sarnath capital have a "heraldic" pose, an artificially "permed" mane, lower incisors visible through a wide open mouth, and a protruding tongue. The four animals on the abacus of this capital have a more natural pose, and are shown moving in a clockwise direction. The bull,[55] lion, and elephant walk sedately; the horse canters. Divyabhanusinh cites Helmut Hemmer on the expression on the lions' face—it is similar to the lion's *flehmen,* the expression of a lion when it senses a lioness in heat or some other powerful or strange smell.[56] In such situations, the animal's body becomes very still and calm. The only difference is that the eyes of the Sarnath lions are open. Whatever may be the case, the Sarnath lions appear to be in a state of majestic stillness, not in a state of angry aggression.

The discussion of Maurya art has often been conducted within a framework of indigenous or foreign influence, and the "heraldic" pose of the Sarnath lions has often been seen as clear evidence of Persian influence. There are other ways of looking at the issue. One is to recognize that the elevation of the status of the lion in India coincided with the rise of large, powerful kingdoms.[57] Ancient kings were aware of their contemporaries' practices and tastes, and it is not surprising that there was a process of give and take. But it was rarely a simple, straightforward process. Ashoka saw himself as an innovator, and sought new symbols and ways of expressing his imperial power and dhamma message. The lion, with its long lineage of royal connections in other parts of Asia, especially in adjacent Achaemenid Asia, was a good candidate. While the style of the Ashokan lions seems strikingly similar to earlier Persian prototypes, the idea of four lions seated back to back was a brilliant innovation not witnessed anywhere else in the world. Further, the combination of the animal symbols with the dhamma message led to the creation of a completely new synthesis in terms of royal ideology.

Although the Sarnath capital with its four crowning lions is visually and conceptually the most stunning of the Ashokan material remains, the elephant is actually as important, if not more so, than the lion in Maurya art. Elephants approaching stupas are part of a relief frieze over the doorway of the Lomash Rishi caves in the Barabar hills. The elephant appears on the Sankisa capital. At Dhauli, there is a carving of the fore part of a tusked elephant emerging out of rock. Its relatively small size does not detract from the dramatic conceptualization. At Girnar and Kalsi, there is a carving of an elephant on the edict-bearing rocks.

The clue to the elephant's importance in the Ashokan context is found in the reference on the Dhauli rock to it as the white elephant, which can be connected with the Buddhist tradition that the Buddha-to-be entered his mother's womb in the form of a white elephant. But we should remember that a white elephant is also the mount of the god Indra and that a white elephant also figures among the sixteen dreams of Trishala, the mother of Mahavira. In fact, in terms of its religious and political significance, the elephant seems to have had far greater importance than the lion in India. Lions and elephants soon became ubiquitous in the sculptural reliefs at Buddhist and Jaina sites and are also found in many Hindu temples. It is difficult to state whether lion and elephant symbolism found its way into the political

domain from the religious arena or vice versa, but the simultaneous importance of these animals in both domains is striking.

As discussed earlier, Ashoka included all living beings in his moral constituency; therefore when he talks about nonviolence, he means nonviolence toward all living beings (*jīvas*, *prāṇas*), which include humans (*manusa*) and animals (*pasu*). In the context of the latter, Ashoka has both wild and domesticated animals in mind, and his injunctions involve abjuring injuring as well as killing animals. The nonkilling of living beings is part of the good (rock edict 11), as is controlled behavior / gentleness toward them (rock edict 9). Such practice leads to the accumulation of merit and the attainment of heaven. Ashoka's rock edict 4 refers to the increase in various vices in times past, including the injury and killing of living beings, and asserts that the promotion of dhamma by the king has led to an unprecedented promotion of the noninjury and nonkilling of living beings and other virtues.

Rock Edict 1 speaks of the king's attempts to curb violence toward animals in three contexts: the killing of animals in sacrifices; in certain popular festive gatherings (*samājas*); and in the royal kitchen. By extension, the second and third contexts can also implicitly refer to hunting animals for food. The inscription starts by stating that no living being is to be killed for sacrifice.[58] It goes on to say that festive gatherings must not be held because the king sees much evil (*dosa*) in them, although there are some that he approves of. This is followed by a statement that previously, in the royal kitchen, hundreds of thousands of animals (there is obvious hyperbole here) were killed every day, but at the time when this inscription was inscribed, these had been reduced to two peacocks and one deer, and the deer not regularly. The edict ends by expressing the hope that even these three animals would not be killed in future. The fact that some animals were still being killed daily for food in the royal kitchen suggests a resistance to the king's attempts to impose vegetarianism among the members of the royal household. But the other two injunctions dealt with issues beyond the royal household. The proscription of animal sacrifice could have been related to both Brahmanical as well as tribal sacrifices. The injunction against the killing of animals in festive gatherings would have hit out at popular cultural practice.

Ashoka also sought to eliminate the violence against animals that was inherent in the king's pursuit of pleasure, specifically in the royal

hunt. In rock edict 8, he tells us,

> In earlier times, kings used to go on pleasure tours [*vihāra-yātās*]. In these, they engaged in hunting and other such pleasures.

When he had been consecrated ten years, the inscription continues, the king went to the place of the Buddha's enlightenment. Thenceforth, royal pleasure tours were replaced by dhamma tours, which included visiting Brahmanas and ascetics and giving them gifts, having audiences with the aged and giving them gold, meeting people of the kingdom or the countryside, instructing them in dhamma, and discussing dhamma with them. It is interesting that the edicts do not refer to the other standard royal vices (*vyasanas*) that are mentioned in the Indian political tradition—namely addiction to alcohol, women, and gambling. Another reference to pleasure tours occurs in the preamble to the minor rock edict at Panguraria in central India. This tells us that while he was still a prince, the king had come to this place on a pleasure tour and had lived here together with his consort.[59] The hills around Panguraria are still forested and abound in game, including tigers and leopards, making it an ideal place for hunting, but this inscription suggests that royal pleasure tours included hunting as well as indulgence in sensual pleasure.

Ashoka did not just stop hunting; he expected his subjects to do so, too. This is implied in his general exhortations not to kill any living beings, and in the claims (in one of the Laghman Aramaic inscriptions and the Shar-i-Kuna Greek-Aramaic inscription) that hunters had stopped hunting and fishermen had stopped fishing due to the king's propagation of dhamma. It is possible that the royal disapproval of hunting and fishing may have had some impact in and around the metropolis, but such claims of the complete elimination of these livelihoods indicate a king whose sense of reality had been seriously affected by illusions of grandeur.

Ashoka's exhortations against injuring animals and humans are accompanied by announcements of positive welfare measures undertaken by the king for them both. In rock edict 2, the king announces various such measures not only in his own kingdom but also in the dominion of bordering kings such as the Cholas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, Keralaputras, Tamraparni (Sri Lanka), the Yavana king

Antiochus, and the latter's neighbors:

> Everywhere two kinds of medical treatment [or hospitals] were established by king Devanampiya Piyadasi—medical treatment for men and medical treatment for animals [*pasu*]. Where there were no medicinal herbs beneficial to men and to animals, everywhere these were brought and planted. Where there were no roots and fruits, everywhere they were brought and planted. Wells were dug on roads and trees were planted for the benefit of animals and men.

All these measures are specifically stated to be for the benefit of humans *and* animals, probably domesticated animals. This is an attitude that extends far beyond a concern that animals (and humans) should not be harmed; it attaches great positive value to ensuring their welfare. The king considers this important political duty, one that goes beyond his political domain to his moral empire and, therefore, to all living beings.

If the most powerful statement against the violence of war occurs in rock edict 13, the most detailed statement about the protection of animals occurs in pillar edict 5. If we compare the ideas expressed in the first rock edict with those of pillar edict 5, we see a consistent commitment to nonviolence toward animals, but also a significant difference. The hesitant statement of imperfect implementation of vegetarianism within the royal household makes way for a wide range of sweeping and very specific injunctions against causing various kinds of injury to specific types of animals and their habitat. These injunctions were issued twenty-six years after the king's consecration (thus, in the twenty-seventh year), and therefore refer to events that took place relatively late in his reign.

The first part of the order is a declaration that certain species of animals are not to be killed (*avadhiya*). These include certain kinds of birds, fish, insects, and mammals.[60] There are problems in reading some of the names on this list, and several species cannot be identified with certainty. It has been pointed out by K. R. Norman that this list can be compared with the lists of animals in the Jaina texts, the *Panhavagaranaim* and *Pannavanasutta*. By undertaking such a comparison, we can identify certain errors made by the scribe who wrote the master copy of pillar edict 5, errors that he no doubt made

because some of the animal names were unfamiliar to him. If amended to correspond to the Jaina lists, Norman argues that the animal list in Ashoka's edict follows the Jaina division of animals into sky-goers, water-goers and land-goers.[61] However, why Ashoka should have followed a Jaina classification of animals is another question, unless this classification had a broader currency.

Notwithstanding the debates over specific animals mentioned in this list, certain general aspects are clear. All of them (with the exception of the parrot and the possible reference to the pigeon, which could be semi-domesticated) are found in the wild. That these were mostly animals that were not usually killed by humans for food or for any other purpose is suggested by the statement in the inscription that this ban is also to apply to all four-footed animals that are useless (that is, from the point of view of human use) and are not eaten. The exception is the rhinoceros, which must have been hunted for its horn, bones, skin, and possibly also meat.[62] Other than the rhinoceros, the species declared inviolable seem to have been ones that would not have been ordinarily killed in large numbers anyway; that is, they were not especially endangered.

Pillar edict 5 goes on to declare the females of certain domesticated species to be inviolable:

> She-goats, ewes and sows that are either pregnant or lactating are not to be killed, nor are their young ones less than six months old.

These injunctions suggest a special concern for potential and nascent life.

The edict also declares a prohibition against killing animals that were hunted in the elephant-forests (*nāga-vanas*) and fish in the fishermen's preserves (the prohibition is both against killing and selling).[63] As discussed earlier, elephants were an extremely important economic and military resource for the state at the time, and the "elephant-forests" were home to many other types of fauna as well. However, this ban applies to certain specific auspicious days,[64] which, according to one calculation, would work out to twenty-four days in a year, in addition to the *uposatha* (fast days), the number of which is not certain and which may have been twice or four times a month.

Other prohibitions are also announced:

> Husk containing living animals [*tuse sajīve*] must not be burned. Forests must not be burnt needlessly or in order to kill living beings.

This indicates that the natural habitat of animals should not be destroyed through burning, presumably either while clearing land for agriculture or while driving out animals during hunting. Further, the king declares that living beings must not be fed with living beings. The term used here is *jīva,* which has generic connotations of all living things, but the context suggests that it refers specifically to animals not being fed with other animals. This imposition of vegetarianism on domesticated animals may sound radical, but seems to have been more of a confirmation of prevailing practice.

The edict not only talks about curbing the killing of animals, but also seeks to regulate injury caused by humans to domesticated animals through castration and branding. Ashoka orders that cocks are not to be castrated, presumably at any time. Bulls, goats, rams, and boar are not be castrated on certain specific days,[65] amounting to some seventy-two days in a year, apart from all auspicious days. The branding of horses and bulls is banned on certain specific days, adding up to forty-seven days in a year.[66]

Pillar edict 5, which deals for the most part with measures concerning animals, ends with a statement about the annual release of prisoners by the king ever since his consecration. Imprisonment was evidently considered a form of violence toward humans, and there seems to be a conceptual connection between the prisoners who were incarcerated and domesticated animals that were subject to confinement by humans. Like rock edict 2, which talks of positive measures for the welfare of humans and animals, here the issue of cruelty toward animals and humans is spoken of in the same breath.

A question that arises is: Given the repeated emphasis on nonviolence as part of dhamma, what was the need for the level of detail reflected in pillar edict 5? On the one hand, this imperial decree elaborates on the forms of violence toward animals that are to be avoided, if not effectively banned; specifies the species that are given protection; and extends the protection to the natural habitat of animals. However, although because of all this, pillar edict 5 *appears* to carry the injunctions against violence toward animals further, it in fact takes a pragmatic stance in acknowledging, permitting, and

regulating such violence, taking human need into account. This is in stark contrast to the blanket, and no doubt un-implementable, exhortations to nonviolence that we see in the earlier edicts. What is also evident in this edict is the ritualization of nonviolence toward animals to coincide with certain days in the lunar calendar, which were considered auspicious, especially the full moon days of the Chaturmasa months (Ashadha, Karttika, and Phalguna) and of the constellations of Tishya and Punarvasu. Furthermore, while the ban on killing animals in the elephant-forests on certain days would have benefited elephants and other animals that shared their habitat, it should be noted that lions and bulls (which in certain areas may well have shared the elephants' habitat), which occur as imperial emblems on the capitals of Ashoka's pillars, are not mentioned specifically in the list of protected animals. In fact, the rhinoceros is the only large mammal included in the list of animals that are not supposed to be killed at any time.

The general impression conveyed by several edicts is that Ashoka had voluntarily abjured hunting and believed (or claimed) that hunters and fishermen in his domain had given up their traditional subsistence practices. On the other hand, pillar edict 5 in fact reflects an attempt to effect a mitigation and calendric regulation of violence against animals, not its complete elimination.

What impact did all these injunctions have? In spite of Ashoka's tall claims of success, the ability of the state to effectively implement such measures was severely limited. The king himself seems to have become a vegetarian and tried to impose vegetarianism on the royal household. He put an end to pleasure tours that involved hunting and engrossed himself in dhamma tours. But what about the larger populace? According to Aloka Parasher-Sen, the king's injunctions in this respect must have seriously affected the livelihoods of communities of hunter-gatherers.[67] However, it is extremely unlikely that a third-century BCE state could have engaged in strict regulation of subsistence activities over anything but a limited area.

Traditional societies that practice elite hunting are known to have conservation strategies such as synchronizing the hunting season with the animals' breeding season and giving special consideration toward the pregnant and the young.[68] The motives of such strategies—to ensure sufficient game for future hunting—are radically different from the compassionate underpinning of Ashoka's measures, which were connected with a strong anti-hunting stance. Other pragmatic reasons

have also been suggested to explain Ashoka's *ahiṁsā* concerns. Implicit in all of them is the idea that the Maurya state had made certain unprecedented political and economic inroads into the forest and that it was at the same time acutely aware of the need to protect the economic resources of the forest. Were Ashoka's injunctions aimed at preventing excessive forest clearance and curbing shifting cultivation?[69] Were they a reaction against forest people who were impeding the state's appropriation of forest wealth?[70] These suggestions may have an element of truth, but they ignore the moral aspects of *ahiṁsā,* which formed the foundation of the injunctions.

Ashoka's inscriptions do not elaborate on *why* violence against all beings is to be avoided, but they do imply three reasons: that such violence injures life; that it has harmful effects for the person who commits it because he incurs sin (*pāpa*) and demerit (*apuṁñya*); and that the avoidance of such violence is meritorious. Pillar edict 3 categorically associates fierceness, cruelty, and anger—the propensities that are associated with violence—with sin and demerit. These ideas may well have been rooted in the Buddha's teachings, in which Ashoka explicitly declares his personal faith in certain inscriptions. However, it should be noted that nonviolence was an important element in other contemporary sects as well—for instance, in Jainism, and probably also among the Ajivikas[71]—although there was considerable variation in its philosophical basis and the extent to which it was practiced. The full import of Ashoka's ideas and measures in relation to animals can, in fact, be understood only against the background of his Buddhist leanings. And the latter have to be understood as part the larger Indian understanding of human-animal relations, especially in view of the inevitable interconnectedness of humans and animals in the karmic universe.[72] The sharp contrast between Ashoka's solicitous concern for forest animals and his harsh attitude toward forest people underlines the political conflict between the Maurya state and forest tribes.

How faithful were later Buddhist legends to Ashoka's powerful anti-hunting convictions and propaganda? Two stories in the *Ashokavadana* reflect a bias against hunting. The terrible death of Ashoka's brother Vitashoka is described as the result of bad karma accumulated in a previous life when he was a hunter. And, as the venerable monk Upagupta explains, the gouging out of the eyes of the beautiful, noble prince Kunala due to the machinations of the jealous queen Tishyarakshita was a result of acts he had committed as a hunter in a

previous life. On the other hand, in the *Ashokavadana,* Ashoka does not stop hunting after turning toward Buddhism.[73] So although hunting is seen as a violent activity with adverse long-term karmic impact, the royal hunt is not frowned on. As we have seen, there is a world of difference between the Ashoka of the edicts and the Ashoka of Buddhist legend.

The Epic Wilderness: *Mahabharata*

The forest, beautiful but dangerous, is central to the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. With its associations with exile, asceticism, and hardship, it is an important locale for the development of necessary detachment, both for renunciants and for kings. Would-be kings face difficulties, challenges, and violent encounters in the forest, testing their endurance, moral fiber, and commitment to dharma.

Different kinds of beings live and meet here. The forest is dotted with numerous *āśramas* of the sages, oases of Brahmanical ritual and practice in the wilderness. It is home to forest dwellers, demons, demigods such as *yakṣas*, and spirits. It is the site of many violent conflicts. And it is the locale for the royal hunt, which is presented as an important activity for kings, symbolizing his great strength, heroism, and mastery over nature. Although the epics share certain similarities in their portrayal of the forest, there are also significant differences, and we will therefore examine them separately.

In the *Mahabharata,* there are named and unnamed forests.[74] The generic terms for forest include *araṇya, vana,* and *kāntāra*. But there are also specific forests such as Naimisha, Khandava, and Kamyaka. One of these is part of the inner narrative frame of the *Mahabharata*. A group of Brahmana sages is assembled in the Naimisha forest, participating in a long, twelve-year sacrifice being performed by their chief Shaunaka. A bard named Ugrashravas turns up, and the sages urge him to tell some of his wonderful stories, especially the one about the Bharata war, which had been narrated by Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa and had later been recited by the latter's pupil Vaishampayana at king Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. The forest is the locale of events that are central to the *Mahabharata*'s main narrative. It is also associated with several well-known substories—for instance those of Nala, Rishyashringa, Mandhata, and Savitri. The Kuru capital is called Hastinapura, "the city of elephants." Descriptions of kings and heroes frequently use animal analogies, among which the lion, bull, elephant, and tiger figure prominently.

The forest is not just the antithesis of the kingdom; its violent decimation forms the kingdom's foundation. After the first round of gambling between the Pandavas and Kauravas, although Yudhishthira loses (the pathetic compulsive gambler that he is!), a reconciliation is

engineered by Dhritarashtra, and the Pandavas are given a heavily forested tract as their share of the kingdom They move into a wilderness called Khandavaprastha and turn it into a city, Indraprastha (Indra's plain). But for this to happen, the forest has to be destroyed. This violent event is described in the Adi Parva, the first book of the epic, and has been interpreted by historians as an epic rendering of an actual historical process—forest clearance as a precursor to city and state formation. The event is described in the epic as part of a conflict between the god Agni and the serpent demon Takshaka, the latter being protected by Indra. The trio wage a terrible war on the forest and its creatures; Agni uses fire, and Krishna and Arjuna shower arrows as they hurtle through the forest on their chariots. No people are mentioned, but the animals of the forest are hunted down and almost completely exterminated. It is a horrible, pitiful sight.

> As the Khāṇḍava was burning, the creatures in their thousands leaped up in all ten directions, screeching their terrifying screams. Many were burning in one spot, others were scorched—they were shattered and scattered mindlessly, their eyes abursting. Some embraced their sons, others their fathers and mothers, unable to abandon them, and thus went to their perdition. Still others jumped up by the thousands, faces distorted, and darting hither and thither fell into the Fire. All over, the souls were seen writhing on the ground, with burning wings, eyes, and paws, until they perished. As all watery places came to a boil.… The turtles and fish were found dead by the thousands. With their burning bodies the creatures in that forest appeared like living torches until they breathed their last. When they jumped out, the Pārtha [Arjuna] cut them to pieces with his arrows and, laughing, threw them back into the blazing Fire.[75]

Indra showered down rain, but Arjuna deflected it with his deftly released arrows. A formidable confederacy of gods, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, demons, and serpents joined the fight to protect the forest, but they were completely ineffectual. The massacre ended when a voice told Indra to cease fighting as Krishna and Arjuna were none others than the gods Nara and Narayana and could not be defeated. There were only six survivors of this forest massacre—the serpent Takshaka's

son Ashvasena, the demon Maya, and four birds. At the end of the violent episode, Indra offered Arjuna and Krisha two boons. Arjuna asked for all kinds of powerful weapons to appear before him at the appropriate time. Krishna asked for eternal friendship with Arjuna. Takshaka, Agni's prime target, was not in the forest at the time, and was therefore not killed. So, one might ask, what was the point of the carnage?

For the royal heroes of the epic, the forest is, above all, a place of exile. The Aranyaka Parva (Book of the forest teaching), also known as the Vana Parva (Book of the forest), describes the life and adventures of the Pandavas during their twelve-year exile in the forest after Yudhishthira is defeated in the second gambling match. As pointed out by J. A. B. van Buitenen, this book serves two important functions: it builds up the character of Yudhishthira, and it brings out the wickedness of the Kauravas, who remorselessly continue to try to kill their cousins, even though the latter have been exiled and have lost everything. It is remarkable that the solidarity that binds the brothers is not broken during their time of trouble in the forest.[76] Initially, they settle in the Kamyaka forest. They then move to the Naimisha forest and travel about incessantly to various forests, *āśrama*s, and places of pilgrimage. On several occasions, Yudhishthira has occasion to give lectures on dharma, especially to the hot-headed Draupadi and Bhima, on why they must live out their stipulated period in exile, conquer their anger, and practice patience.

> "The promise I made is a true one, remember,
> I choose, over life and eternity, Law [dharma].
> Neither kingdom nor sons, neither glory nor wealth,
> Can even come up to a fraction of Truth!"[77]

Yudhishthira also pragmatically points out that there is no point retaliating against the Kauravas with violence at this stage, as their cousins have many powerful allies.

Although the Pandavas don the birch-bark garments of ascetics when they set out for the forest, their sojourn there is anything but solitary, frugal, or dull. They are accompanied by Brahmanas, ascetics, their household priest Dhaumya, and servants, and they live well on forest produce and venison. They have a hectic social life. They are visited by Vidura, Sanjaya, and their allies. Various *gandharva*s and

sages drop by, the latter to tell them stories and give advice. The brothers perform austerities, discuss politics, and plan what they will do once their exile is over. They are constantly on the move, Bhima often carrying their mother, Kunti, on his strong, broad shoulders. In the course of their travels in the forest, the Pandavas fight fierce battles against numerous demons and *yakṣas*. They make a tour of places of pilgrimage (*tīrthas*). Bhima has a torrid love affair with a demoness named Hidimba and a son named Ghatotkacha is born of their union. Arjuna continues his hunt for weapons, setting off for Indra's world. On the way, he performs fierce austerities in the Himalayas, battles the god Shiva who has taken the guise of a Kirata hunter, and receives from him the powerful Pashupata weapon. He is welcomed by Indra, receives celestial weapons, and spends five long years in Indra's heaven, learning about weapons, singing, and dancing —skills that would later serve him well. The brothers live in forest *āśramas*, but they still hunt. It is during one of their hunting sessions that Draupadi is kidnapped by Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu and brother-in-law of the Kauravas. It is only at the end of their twelve-year exile, as they enter into the year they have to spend incognito, that they send off their entourage.

During their sojourn in the wilderness, the Pandavas are reminded of other exiled kings who had experienced similar hardships but had triumphed over them. Twice in the Book of the Forest, Yudhishthira asks dispiritedly whether there has ever been anyone as unfortunate as he. Both times, he receives an answer in the affirmative. The first time, the sage Brihadashva tells him the story of Nala, who, like Yudhishthira, had lost his kingdom because of dicing but had regained it. Later, the sage Markandeya tells Yudhishthira the story of king Rama, who had also suffered exile and had won back his kingdom after fighting against much higher odds: He had killed a terrible ten-headed demon and rescued his wife, with monkeys as his only allies.

The forest is a place associated with asceticism and the death of kings and heroes. In the later part of his life, king Yayati lives in the forest, performing sacrifices and austerities. Pratipa hands over his kingdom to his son Shantanu and retires to the forest as an ascetic. Krishna, knowing that his time has come, goes to the forest and lies down, absorbed in the highest yoga. This is where the hunter Jara, mistaking him for a deer, shoots him in the one spot in his body that is not invulnerable—the sole of his foot.

In accordance with the classical *āśrama* model, epic kings often

retire to the forest in their old age, accompanied by their wives. Dasharatha, Gandhari, and Kunti retire to the forest accompanied by Vidura and Sanjaya, and spend their last days there, performing austerities and subsisting on roots and fruit. Vidura performs especially fierce ascetic practices. The king and his queens ultimately die in a forest fire. The concern that they have perished in an unconsecrated fire is laid to rest by the information provided by the sage Narada that the aged Dhritarashtra, ultimately subsisting only on air, had been consumed along with his wives by his own sacred sacrificial fire, which had spread into a conflagration on the banks of the sacred Ganga River.

The epic heroes frequently encounter natives of the forest. The generic terms used for these people include *mleccha* and *dasyu.* There are also references to specific forest dwellers, and among these, the most prominent are the Nishadas. The Nishadas are among those defeated in the course of the Pandava prince Sahadeva's expeditions in the south. But they are also combatants in the great war as allies of the Kauravas. Forest dwellers attend Yudhishthira's *rājasūya* sacrifice. Forest people can be used by the state as soldiers and as spies. So although the people of the forest are seen as political adversaries and as cultural others, some of them are presented as partially assimilated into state society.

The Nishadas are central to one of the two origins of kingship recounted in the Shanti Parva, discussed in Chapter 1. According to this story, the sages killed the bad king Vena by stabbing him with *kusha* grass sanctified with their mantras. They then churned Vena's right thigh with mantras

> and out of it, there on the ground, was born an ugly little man. He had red eyes and black hair, and looked like a charred post. "Stay down!" those *brahman*-speaking seers said to him. And so there came into being the awful Niṣādas, who took to the mountains and forests, and those other barbarians [*mlecchas*] who dwell in the Vindhya mountains by the hundreds and thousands.[78]

Niṣīda means "stay down." The sages had immediately recognized that this ugly man was not kingly material. They then churned the right hand of Vena, and from it emerged Prithu, learned in the Veda and resplendent in full war gear. Even though the Nishada is told to get lost, the fact that he is an important and integral part of the story indicates a recognition of the political role of the tribes who lived in the forests and mountains.

The Nishadas also feature poignantly in two places in the *Mahabharata* narrative, in the first as political rivals and in the second as scapegoats. Arjuna is Drona's favorite pupil and the latter promises him that no archer in the world will ever be able to rival him. One day, Ekalavya, the son of Hiranyadhanus (Golden bow), appears

before Drona and asks to be instructed in archery; Drona rejects him on account of his social origins—he is a prince, but a prince of the Nishadas. Ekalavya touches Drona's feet and returns to the forest. He makes a clay effigy of Drona, and he hones his archery skills with great dedication, venerating this effigy as if it were Drona himself. One day, while the Pandavas were hunting in their chariots, a dog who was following them got lost in the forest and encountered the Nishada prince:

> When the dog smelled that black Niṣāda in the woods, wrapped in black deerskin, his body caked with dirt, it kept about him, barking away. When the cur kept on barking, the Niṣāda, displaying his deft skill, shot almost simultaneously seven arrows into its mouth. Its mouth full of arrows, the dog went back to the Pāṇḍavas, and on seeing the animal the heroes were greatly surprised. As they looked and noticed this supreme feat of fast, blind shooting, they became humble and praised its author in every way. The Pāṇḍavas then went out into the woods to look for the forest-dweller and found him … ceaselessly shooting arrows.[79]

On being questioned, he told them that he was a Nishada prince and a student of Drona. The Pandava brothers report this incident to Drona, and Arjuna confronts him about his promise. Drona approaches Ekalavya and asks him for his right thumb as a teacher's fee, and the noble Ekalavya happily obliges. Drona has ensured that none will be able to excel Arjuna in archery, least of all a forest dweller, even if he is a prince.

In the second incident, the Pandavas are about to leave for the city of Varanavata to attend a festival.[80] Duryodhana uses the opportunity to try to kill them. He asks one of his men, Purochana, to rush to Varanavata and build a house of highly inflammable material there for the Pandavas, in a lonely place near a weapon store. The plan is to burn them alive when they are asleep in this house. Yudhishthira sees through the plot but plays along. A friend of their uncle Vidura helps them by digging a hiding place under the house, where they sleep every night. Yudhishthira holds a night-time feast for Brahmanas. After the Brahmanas leave, a Nishada woman arrives, accompanied by her five sons. They drink and fall asleep. Bhima sets fire to the place

where Purochana is sleeping, and the house is engulfed in flames. The Pandavas and their mother, Kunti, escape via the underground passage; it is presumed that the burnt bodies of the Nishada woman and her sons are theirs.

Apart from these violent episodes, there is a positive portrayal of a barbarian king in the *Mahabharata*. The *dasyu* Kapavya, a wise and brave ruler of the Nishadas, is said to have attained perfection. He was a great victor who followed the Kshatriya dharma and had metal weapons. He ruled well and righteously, established laws, was learned, and free from cruelty.[81]

> Protecting the Brahmins that lived in the wild and those that passed through it in their wanderings, he brought them animals he had killed in the great forest. For those who would not take it because they suspected it was a barbarian's [*dasyu*'s] food, he would put some down at their houses at dawn and go.[82]

Kapavya was chosen by the wild barbarians to be their leader, and under his guidance, they gave up their evil ways. He taught them to wage war honorably and not to kill women, children, the helpless, or ascetics. He urged them to ensure the welfare of cows and Brahmanas and to fear the Brahmanas' power and wrath. He told them to never cause any hindrance to crops in fields, nor create any obstacles to the honoring of the gods, ancestors, or guests. But Kapavya was not a "pure" barbarian; he was born of a Kshatriya father and a Nishada mother. No doubt, his Kshatriya blood was responsible for the fact that he ruled like a good Kshatriya king.

The gap between the "cultured" and the "barbarian" was not unbridgeable. The *Mahabharata* mentions *mlecchas* and many forest tribes living within the kingdom. They include Yavanas, Kiratas, Gandharvas, Chinas, Shabaras, Barbaras, Shakas, Tusharas, Kahvas, Pahlavas, Andhras, Madrakas, Odras, Pulindas, Ramathas, and Kachas.[83] King Mandhata asks the god Indra how these *dasyus* could be made to follow dharma. Indra replies that they must do the following things: obey kings; obey their mothers and fathers; perform the rites prescribed in the Vedas; perform the rites and offerings for the ancestors; make gifts; and adhere to nonviolence and truth. This suggests that these "barbarians" could basically perform all the rituals that the *āryas* did and this is confirmed by Indra's statement that these

rites were enjoined in the past and were now to be performed by all. King Mandhata observes that *dasyus* live in the world in all the four *varṇas*, and follow the four *āśramas*, although in different ways.

As expected, hunters are low in the *Mahabharata*'s social hierarchy. Krishna is killed by a hunter named Jara, who pierces the sole of his foot with his arrow. And yet the Brahmana Kaushika is given a lesson in dharma by a wise hunter.[84] This hunter eked out his living by dealing in slaughtered animals. He had been reduced to this position due to a sinful act committed in a previous birth. When Kaushika runs down his profession, the hunter responds that he is doing his dharma, and that this is the only way in which he can improve his prospects in future births.

But the king as hunter is a different matter altogether. The king will and must hunt and kill animals in the forest, though excessive hunting can lead to problems. Among the royal vices, the *Mahabharata* focuses the most on gambling, but also has a great deal to say about hunting. Momentous events and romantic encounters often occur in the forest during the royal hunt. Shantanu is hunting in the forest when he chances upon the beautiful goddess Ganga. Yayati is hunting when he runs into Devayani and Sharmishtha, with whom he has complex liaisons. King Dushyanta goes on a hunting expedition and after killing many animals in the forest, enters the *āśrama* of the sage Kanva, where he meets and falls in love with the sage's adopted daughter Shakuntala. But every one of these romantic encounters presages unfortunate events, adversity, even disaster.

The most dramatic of these episodes is associated with Parikshit and Pandu. King Parikshit goes deep into a forest in pursuit of a deer and runs into the sage Shamika, who is observing a vow of silence. When asked whether he has seen the deer, the sage says nothing. A furious Parikshit wraps a dead snake around Shamika's neck. When the latter's hot-headed son Shringin returns and finds out what has transpired, he curses Parikshit to die of snake bite in seven days. And this is exactly what happens. The second incident takes place when Pandu is out hunting in the forest and shoots a pair of mating deer. In the forest, things are often not what they seem; the deer are actually an ascetic and his wife. As he dies, the male deer delivers the curse that both Pandu and his partner will die if he ever has sex. Pandu sends his attendants back to Hastinapura and lives his life practicing austerities in the forest along with his two wives. But he cannot control his desire for Madri; he dies and she commits *satī*. In both

these cases, the royal hunt leads to a curse, death, and disaster.

There are debates on killing animals for food and in sacrifice in the *Mahabharata.* Bhishma extolls nonviolence and condemns meat-eating, but states that it is not sinful for Kshatriyas to eat meat obtained through hunting, because wild animals have been consecrated to the gods of the forest.[85] The royal hunt is not generally the subject of heated debate. However, there is one episode where the issue of the Pandavas' hunting (presumably for food and for sport) *is* directly raised. The Aranyaka Parva tells us that once, while the brothers were residing in the Dvaita forest, and Yudhishthira was sleeping,

> there appeared to him in his dream some deer with tears in their throats. They folded their hoofs and stood trembling. The great king said to them, "Say what you have to say! Who are you and what is your wish?" At these words of the famed Pāṇḍava Kaunteya, the deer, the remnant of many killed, replied to Yudhiṣṭhira, "We are the deer that survive in the Dvaitavana, Bhārata. Change your abode, great king, lest we all be killed off. All your brothers are heroes and expert armsmen, and you have reduced the herds of forest game to but few. We have been left as the seed of the future, O sage, may we prosper by your grace, Yudhiṣṭhira, Indra among kings!" Upon seeing the trembling and frightened deer that survived as mere seed, Yudhiṣṭhira the King dharma felt very sorry; and the king, who was intent on the well-being of all creatures [*sarva-bhūta-rata*], agreed: "You are speaking the truth and I shall do as you say."[86]

Yudhishthira wakes from the dream full of compassion (*dayā*) and tells his brothers about the weeping deer. He speaks of how the deer had dwindled during the year and eight months that the Pandavas had been living in the forest, and how it was time to show compassion to the animals of the forest. The brothers decide to leave for the Kamyaka forest the very next day. Leaving aside this single episode, the Pandava princes hunt happily and incessantly while in the forest.

The Forest in the *Ramayana*

As in the *Mahabharata,* so in the *Ramayana,* there is a generic forest and there are specific ones. The latter, through which the protagonists roam during their exile, include the forested Chitrakuta Mountain and Dandakaranya or Janasthana. Four books of the *Ramayana* are set in forest locales, and the protagonists spend fourteen years of their lives here. The forest is the place where Valmiki is moved to invent a new poetic meter—the shloka—when he sees the male of a pair of *krauncha* birds engaged in love-play being ruthlessly killed by a hunter's arrow. It is in the intervals of Rama's *aśvamedha* sacrifice, held in an enclosure for a sacrifice in the Naimisha forest, that his sons Kusha and Lava sweetly sing the *Ramayana,* narrating Rama's story to a mesmerized audience that includes the protagonist himself.

The wilderness is presented as the antithesis of the capital city, but Rama's presence plays a pivotal symbolic mediating role. As Rama leaves for the forest, the people want to follow him:

> Let the wilderness [*vana*] where Rāghava [Rama] goes become our city [*nagara*], and the city [*pura*] we abandon turn into a wilderness (*vana*).
>
> Let all the animals leave their haunts, the snakes their lairs, the birds and beasts their mountain slopes, and take possession of what we have left.[87]

There are kingdoms in the forest. When Dasharatha proposes to announce Rama as his heir, he invites all kings, including those of the *mlecchas* from the forests and mountains. When the exiled prince of Kosala enters the forest, he enters a complex political space. Although Kishkindha seems to have been given a spatial location in the south, its king rules over huge numbers of monkeys inhabiting different areas, especially mountains and forests. The kingdom of Lanka, described as a southern island, is ruled by the demon Ravana. Ravana's sway is not confined to the island but extends to the mainland; his deputies roam the Dandaka forest, tormenting the sages who perform sacrifices and adhere to dharma. So the wilderness is not a clearly demarcated political sphere. It is, above all, a place where very different kinds of beings—princes, ascetics, hunters, *vānaras*,

demons, animals, and others—move around and meet. It has been suggested that the creatures of the forest, especially the *vānaras* and the *rākṣasas*, are like shadows (inversions) of the idealized protagonists, enabling the representation of negative and ambiguous propensities of human nature but keeping the protagonists untarnished by them.[88]

The forest is a place of exile, adventure, and transgression, and as the characters tell us on several occasions, a place where the moral codes of the city do not apply. It is in the forest that Rama performs one of the two acts that have raised questions about his judgment and righteousness over the centuries—the killing of Vali. In Lanka, Sita is kept not in the palace but in a grove, an intermediate space between the city and wilderness. Ironically, this place, where she experiences so much grief and suffering, is called Ashoka (literally, "without sorrow").

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana visit various *āśramas* of the sages during their travels in the forest. The description of these hermitages emphasizes their peaceful, tranquil environment, signaled by the presence of the ubiquitous tame deer. These oases of Brahmanical culture in the forest are associated with the performance of sacrifices. Agastya's hermitage also has shrines dedicated to various gods. The *āśrama* is a place where weapons are generally taboo. The surrogate king Bharata travels on foot, wears only silk clothes (minus his ornaments and other regal accoutrements), and leaves his weapons behind when he travels to Bharadvaja's *āśrama.* However, Rama receives several celestial weapons in Agastya's hermitage.

Duryodhana does not demand the Pandavas' death, or Kaikeyi Rama's. Exile in the forest is preferred to killing. It can be argued that if it had been otherwise, there would be no travels, no adventures in exile, no story. But what is the rationale of exile from the political perspective of the epics? An obvious reason is that given the hardships and dangers of the forests, the protagonists are likely to perish. Manthara, Kaikeyi's hunch-backed maid-servant, gives another reason: When Rama is exiled, he will lose his place in the people's hearts. While he is away, Bharata will be able to establish his position firmly and surround himself with friends and allies.

Exile in the forest is an aberration vis-à-vis the *āśrama* scheme and as in the *Mahabharata,* there are discussions in the *Ramayana* of the right time to go to the forest. Lakshmana points out to Rama that a Kshatriya king is supposed to go to the forest only after ruling his kingdom, discharging his debts to the sages, gods, ancestors, and Brahmanas, and handing the kingdom over to his son.[89]

> "Later on, many years from now, my brother, when your sons in turn are protecting the subjects, you can go to live in the forest.
>
> For according to the ways of the royal seers of old, living in the forest is prescribed only after entrusting one's subjects to one's sons, to protect as though they were their very own sons."[90]

Later, there is a debate on the issue.[91] Bharata urges Rama to return to Ayodhya, and the sage Vasishtha and the Brahmana Jabali agree. Bharata argues that the lives of the Kshatriya and ascetic are incompatible. The householder's stage is the most important one, and Rama must not renounce it. Other arguments are put forward too, but Rama rejects them all, citing compassion and his commitment to uphold truth, two important elements of kingship. He also emphasizes his commitment to honor his father's word to Kaikeyi. In fact, this discussion gives Rama the occasion to strongly criticize Kshatriya dharma. He says that *adharma* and dharma go hand in hand in Kshatriya dharma, and that it is a code that is only observed by men who are low, cruel, greedy, and sinful. The forest life is far preferable:

> "I will thus live a life of purity in the forest, restricting my food to holy things, roots, fruit, and flowers, and satisfying the gods and ancestors. My five senses will have contentment enough, and I shall be maintaining the world on its course. Moreover, I myself shall remain a sincere believer, fully aware of what is right and what is wrong."[92]

Rama is critiquing the ambition, cruelty, and violence associated with kingship and contrasting it with life in the forest. Though not as strongly or as often as Yudhishthira, he, too, is drawn to the forest life. But he has in mind the forest that is the place of contemplation and asceticism, not the forest of the demons and moral transgressions.

There is a visible amalgamation of ascetic and Kshatriya ideals as the protagonists move into and through the forests. The sheer difference of the forest from the city is indicated by the protagonists changing their clothes. They enter the forest in the garb of ascetics wearing bark robes. They eat simple food. However, the Kshatriya aspect of their forest sojourn is indicated by certain other details. The two princes Rama and Lakshmana regularly hunt for food. When they reach Chitrakuta, Lakshmana kills a black antelope, which is then offered to the spirits of the area and as a sacrifice to the gods. Ravana's sister Shurpanakha is confused by their appearance. Although the brothers wear the skins of black antelope (associated with ascetics), they have all the marks of royalty. Were they ascetics, gods, or mortals?

As mentioned in Chapter 4, on one occasion, the propriety of bearing arms in the forest is questioned, and it is questioned by Sita.[93] She tells Rama that she is speaking out of love and respect for him, reminding him, not teaching him, of the dangers of unprovoked violence. She refers to three vices (*vyasanas*)—lying, sexual relations with another man's wife, and violence (*raudratā*). She observes that Rama, who has mastered his senses, has never been and can never be guilty of the first two of these.

> "But the third one, violence—the taking of life without provocation, and recklessly—to this you may be prone."[94]

Sita is afraid that Rama and Lakshmana might cause harm to innocent forest dwellers. She talks about the dangers of weapons and of how a

great sage practicing asceticism in a forest was once ruined and went to hell because the god Indra had left a sword to be guarded as a pledge in his hermitage. Due to his constant proximity with the sword, the sage became prone to violence, and he ultimately went to hell. Weapons and the forest are incompatible, Sita avers. The customs of the forests must be respected. But this expression of doubt is brushed aside. As Rama explains to her, he and Lakshmana have to be armed in the forest: How else could they deal with its dangers? How else could they offer protection to those who needed it? How else could they fulfil their Kshatriya duty as protectors of the sacrifice-performing ascetics?

And yet, as in the *Mahabharata,* certain episodes in the *Ramayana* suggest a negative subtext with regard to the hunt. Rama's pursuit of the many-colored deer (the demon Maricha in disguise) at Sita's insistence, leads directly to her abduction by Ravana. Even more significant is Dasharatha's inadvertent killing of an ascetic while hunting, which leads to a curse with far-reaching disastrous consequences for the lineage. The incident, as old Dasharatha tells queen Kausalya, took place when he was a young, impetuous prince on a hunting expedition.[95] He had attained a reputation as an archer and loved to hunt buffaloes, elephants, and other wild animals. One day, while hunting before dawn along the Sarayu River in the rainy season, he thought he heard some sounds. Thinking it was a wild elephant moving around near a waterhole, he shot an arrow in its direction. The arrow hit its mark, but the target turned out to be a young ascetic who was drawing water from the river to take back for his blind parents. The ascetic was not a Brahmana, but the son of a Shudra mother and Vaishya father. As he lay wounded, pierced by the arrow, he berated the prince in anger. How could he use a weapon against an innocent ascetic who had renounced violence (*daṇḍa*)? This was a terrible act contrary to dharma, a sin as enormous as having sex with a teacher's wife. As Dasharatha sorrowfully removed the arrow from his body, the ascetic breathed his last breath.

It was now the prince's job to tell the blind parents about the terrible accident. The father, also an ascetic, told Dasharatha that a Kshatriya who kills an ascetic knowingly falls from his place. But he added that Dasharatha's crime was mitigated by two factors. The first was that he had confessed his sin; otherwise his head would have shattered into a thousand pieces. The second was that he had not committed the act intentionally but in ignorance; had it been

otherwise, his whole lineage would have been destroyed.

> "Since it was unintentionally that you struck down my pure son, I will only lay a curse on you, though it is a grievous and very dreadful one:
> Just as I now sorrow over my son's calamity, so you, too, your majesty, shall end your days grieving for your son."[96]

That is exactly what came to pass: Many years later, Dasharatha died of grief on Rama's departure to the forest. Apart from the element of foreknowledge that this event gives Dasharatha, it is also important because it knits together several key elements of the epic world: the inexorable efficacy of the curse, karma, *varṇa,* kingship, ascetics, control of the senses, hunting, intentionality, and violence. We have noted that elephants had great economic and military value for the state. The story of Dasharatha's hunting accident, which leads to a curse that results in eventual disaster, suggests that kings did hunt elephants. But it also suggests the beginning of a disapproval, even a taboo against it.

As Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana prepare to depart for their forest exile, Rama's mother Kausalya's benediction refers anxiously to the perils of the forest:

> "May you not be troubled by monkeys or scorpions, by gnats or flies in the woods, by snakes or insects in the jungle thickets.
>
> May the huge elephants not harm you, my dear son, not the lions, tigers, bears, boars, or ferocious horned buffalo.
>
> May the other ferocious breeds of creatures that feed on human flesh not injure you, my son, for these fervid prayers I now offer them."[97]

But apart from its association with violent demons and physical hardship, much of the imaging of the forest in the *Ramayana* is actually very positive. The forest has its own benevolent deities, whom the sages and protagonists honor. It is a place of wondrous and beautiful plants and animals. Valmiki feelingly describes the natural beauty of Chitrakuta and Panchavati. As they travel toward Chitrakuta, Sita excitedly asks Rama about the unfamiliar flowers and creepers they pass, and Lakshmana brings her plants and flowers of varied kinds. At Panchavati, Rama instructs Lakshmana about choosing the spot where he should build their hut—it should have a lovely view, ready availability of sacrificial material, and lots of beautiful flowers. Living in the forest with his wife and brother, performing the oblations, eating sweet fruits and roots, Rama does not long for Ayodhya or for kingship. Later, after Sita's abduction, Rama and Sita talk to the trees and animals of the forest, and nature responds feelingly to their sorrowful soliloquies.

Although Dasharatha laments about the difficulties that Rama and Sita will face in the forest, in spite of the fact that they are accustomed to living a life of royal luxury, they are actually very happy there, until, of course, they are separated. Describing the beauty of the Chitrakuta Mountain, Rama says to Sita,

> "If I might live here all the years to come with you, my flawless wife, and with Lakṣmaṇa, I would never feel the searing pain of

grief.

For I delight in this lovely mountain, my beautiful wife, with its magnificent peaks where fruit and flowers are so abundant and many different birds come flocking.…

Vaidehī [Sita], you take delight, don't you, in being with me on Citrakūṭa, with so many different marvels before your eyes to experience, to contemplate and talk about?"[98]

Compared to the *Mahabharata,* the *Ramayana* has a much more positive portrayal of forest people. This emerges most clearly in the portrayal of the Nishada king Guha, a strong, brave, and loyal forest king who plays a prominent role in the epic. He is Rama's good friend (*priya-sakha*). As he steps forth into exile, Rama heads straight for Shringaverapura, ruled over by Guha. When he hears of Rama's arrival, Guha rushes forth to greet him, accompanied by his family and ministers, and offers him gifts. Rama refuses the gifts on the ground that he had taken the vows of an ascetic and can accept only fodder for the horses.[99] He greets Guha, who is described as the king (*rājā*) and overlord (*adhipati*) of the Nishada tribe, by asking whether all is well with his kingdom (*rāṣṭra*), allies (*mitra*), and treasury (*dhana*).[100] He advises him to never neglect his army (*bala*), treasury (*kośa*), fort (*durga*), or the land and its people (*janapada*).[101] Guha's people live by hunting and fishing and are skilled boatsmen. The forest king knows the forest well and therefore is an excellent source of information about forest routes. He is also militarily strong—he tells Rama that he is capable of withstanding even a huge fourfold army.[102]

Later, when Bharata heads toward the forest to beseech Rama to come back, he, too, meets Guha, who gives him gifts of fruits, honey, roots, fish, meat, and other forest items. Guha is surrounded by thousands of people. He takes care of the needs of Bharata's army during the night, tells Bharata where Rama is, and leads him there. After the war is over, Rama sends Hanuman to go to Ayodhya, but tells him to first go to Shringavera and convey his greetings and news of his victory to Guha. It is Guha who will show Hanuman the way to Ayodhya.

The tribal portrayed in the most positive light in the *Ramayana* is Shabari, who appears in the third book of the epic. Her name connects her with the Shavara tribe, but she is described as an ascetic who

lived in a forest hermitage of the sage Matanga on the shores of Lake Pampa. The sages she had been serving had departed to the other world, but they had instructed her to wait till Rama appeared in the *āśrama* so that she could receive and serve him. When Rama comes to her hermitage, she immolates herself and goes to heaven. The later *Ramayana* tradition elaborates on Shabari's story. She is the daughter of a hunter who renounces the world after being revolted by the sight of animals being prepared for slaughter for her wedding feast. She becomes a pupil of the sage Matanga and grows old in his hermitage. The sage prophecies that one day Rama will come her way, and she will attain great merit by serving him. So she waits patiently and longingly for Rama. After many, many years, Rama does come to her hermitage and Shabari serves him *ber* (the fruit, Zizyphus jujube). The unusual aspect of this offering is that Shabari first bites into each *ber* to ascertain whether or not it is sweet, because she wants to offer Rama only the sweet ones. Lakshmana is horrified at her behavior and refuses to partake, but Rama accepts the fruit joyfully, giving his ardent devotee his blessings. Shabari became the prototype of the ideal devotee in the *Ramayana* tradition.

The Animal Characters

One of the most striking aspect of the *Ramayana* is its portrayal of forest animals. There are two kinds of animals in the text: the ordinary ones, and the special ones. The *vānara*s, although apparently monkeys, are not ordinary animals at all; they were created by the gods to help Rama achieve his divine mission.[103] They have divine parentage: They are the sons of gods produced on *apsara*ses, *gandharvī*s, *yakṣī*s, and *vānarī*s and possess magical powers. They roam the forest, but live in the kingdom of Kishkindha. They are not really animals, but characters visualized in animal form. However, the very fact that they are visualized as such and play such an important role, interacting on an even footing with humans, shows the epic's exceptional empathy for animals.

The animal characters are strikingly similar to humans in their political organization, kinship relations, and emotions, as well as in their capacity for righteous (and unrighteous) action. The familiar animal analogies in the descriptions of heroic human warriors and kings—comparisons with the lion, elephant, tiger, and bull—are also applied to the characters who have an animal form. For instance, Hanuman and Sugriva are on several occasions described as bulls among monkeys; Vali is referred to as a lion and a tiger among the monkeys. Special importance is attached to the kings of the animals. The vulture king Jatayu's heroic attempt to prevent Ravana from carrying Sita away shows his great sense of righteousness, devotion, and self-sacrifice. Sugriva, king of the *vānara*s, is a key ally in Rama's bid to regain Sita.

But the most engaging character in animal form is the *vānara* Hanuman, strong and powerful and learned in all the branches of traditional knowledge. He had received a boon from Brahma that he could not be killed by any weapon, and one from Indra that he would die only when he chose. Like the other *vānara*s, he can change his form (including taking human form), and can expand and contract his body at will. He is a perfect, able, and devoted helper. He intuitively knows that Sita is innocent and urges Rama to recognize this. Every now and then, he himself berates or is berated for his monkey nature. But the overall portrayal is that of an immensely powerful, wise, and devoted being. It is not surprising that Hanuman eventually became a focus of worship. The moral codes of humans apply to the "animal"

characters. But on occasion, as when Rama kills Vali, there is mention of animal nature being different from human nature, and this is given as justification for the trapping and killing of animals.[104]

Some historians have argued that the *vānaras* represent tribals, but this is a very simplistic and mechanical reading of the epic. As already explained, they are fantastic, semidivine beings, visualized in animal form. In fact, what stands out most in the *Ramayana* is the extraordinarily intimate connection between humans and animals (whether "real" or fantastic). The strong reciprocal love they share is indicated by the fact that the *vānaras* are ready to die for Rama; and at the end of the epic, the boon that the noble prince asks for is that the dead monkeys should be brought back to life.

The Forest as an Economic Resource: The *Arthashastra*

From the magical world of the epics let us step into the hard-headed world of the political treatises, looking first at the forest in the *Arthashastra* and then the *Nitisara.* The principal occupations listed by Kautilya are agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade. Hunting does not figure. In the description of the ideal *janapada,* we are told that it should be endowed with arable land, material forests, and elephant forests, and should be rich in domesticated animals (*paśu*). But the ideal *janapada* should also be devoid of wild animals (*vyāla*), deer (*mṛga*), and forest people (*aṭavis*).[105] Kautilya advises the king to initiate the establishment of new agrarian settlements, which would have involved forest clearance and the destruction of forest habitats. Not surprisingly for a work on political economy, the *Arthashastra* recognizes the enormous economic and military potential of the forest and hence discusses it in greater detail than any other ancient Indian text. Exploitation, conflict, and violence—direct and implied—are inherent in its discussion of the relationship between the state and the forest.

Kautilya talks incessantly about the wilderness and its inhabitants. The terms in the text that have "foresty" connotations are *vana, araṇya, aṭavi,* and (less frequently) *kāntāra.* The people who inhabit the wilderness are referred to as *vanacaras*, *araṇyavāsins*, and *āṭavikas*. These terms seem to be used interchangeably and do not carry distinct or different meanings. In one place, *vana* is defined in a broader way as consisting of spaces or enclosures (*parigraha*) associated with domesticated and wild animals, materials, and elephants,[106] extending its connotations beyond the wilderness.

In terms of location, there are two kinds of forests in the *Arthashastra*—those separate and far from the village; and those adjacent and connected to the village. The latter is suggested by the fact that the forest is included in the census of villages.[107] But the main classification of forests is based on the major resource they provide to the state. Kautilya visualizes the wilderness as a space into which the state aggressively extends its administrative and fiscal activity. Because it is a rich economic and military resource, it is a space to be controlled, exploited, protected, and enhanced.

The forest is not necessarily a "natural" space. It can be altered,

manipulated, modified, even created. The king is advised to establish *vanas*, and the officer known as the *kupyādhyakṣa* is told to establish factories for the manufacture of goods made from forest produce outside as well as inside the forest.

> And he should establish a forest, one for each product designated as forest produce, as well as factories [*karmāntāḥ*] associated with [materials from] the material forests and forest people [*aṭavi*] living in the material forests.[108]

Such factories are geared toward the production of goods for ensuring the livelihood and the protection of the city.[109] This suggests the ideas of afforestation, the economic colonization of the forest by the state, and the creation of manufacturing units in the wilderness. The importance of the forest as a productive resource on which the city and the state depend is the reason why it must be protected.

Although Kautilya has the idea of a generic forest, he also classifies forests into three types on the basis of their resources into elephant forests (*hasti / nāga / dvipa-vana*); material forests (*dravya-vana*); and wild animal or deer forests (*mṛga-vana*). Why did Kautilya devise such a classification? After all, it is perfectly conceivable that a particular forest could have an abundance of all three kinds of resources—elephants, materials, deer and other wild animals. In a text on *artha,* which revels in classifications, it makes perfect sense to classify forests on the basis of their *dominant* type of economic resource. Kautilya's first analytical step was to identify the two major types of forest from the point of view of the state's economic interests—animal and material. The fact that elephants on their own lent their name to a category of forests (and the other animals are grouped together in another category) indicates the enormous economic and military importance of this animal for the state.[110] And the fact that various types of material produce are grouped together into one category indicates that none of them was individually of as great importance as elephants were in the category of animal resources. At the same time, the division between wild animals and forest produce was not absolute, as the body parts of certain animals (discussed below) were also included among the forest produce.

It seems that the three types of forests are not really a classification of *all* forests, but only of forest tracts that are under state control.

They are conceived of as protected forests where a certain dominant type of resource is to be exploited in a judicious manner by the state. This is why they have to be protected by officials of the state and transgressors have to be punished. Although different kinds of resources could no doubt be found in various types of forests, the classification of forests into different categories on the basis of the dominant exploitable resource for the state and their identification on that basis was more than a pedantic classificatory exercise; it could form the basis of a sustained and balanced exploitation of forest resources by the state.[111]

The most important types of forest from the point of view of the *Arthashastra,* and therefore the state, are the elephant forests and material forests, which are discussed in considerable detail. Their importance is indicated by Kautilya's recommendation that even if the king is in financial straits, he should not made demands on them.[112] Officers in charge of these two kinds of forests should get handsome salaries (4,000 *paṇas*), on par with the superintendents of infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants.[113] If someone sets a material forest or elephant forest on fire, he should be burned. Kautilya disagrees with other experts who held the material forests to be superior to the elephant forests. He argues that while it is possible to plant many material forests on many tracts of land, this is not the case with the elephant forests. The material forests are a source of fortifications, carriages, and chariots (that is, by providing wood), but the elephant forests are a source of elephants, which are the backbone of the king's army, and are therefore more important:

> A king's victory is principally dependent on elephants. For elephants, with their huge-sized bodies and being capable of life-destroying acts, can annihilate an enemy's soldiers, battle formations, forts, and camps.[114]

Among the elephant forests, Kautilya identifies the best, middling, and worst sources of elephants. He goes on to indicate the places where these are found: The best ones are from Kalinga and Angara; those of medium quality are from Chedi, Karusha, Dasharṇa, and Aparanta; the lowest quality ones are from Surashtra and Panchanada.[115] The best elephants come from eastern India and the worst ones from the north. As pointed out by Trautmann, this list,

which is repeated in later texts, was compiled from a northern point of view, because it ignores the elephants that are found (even today) in the Western Ghats in South India.[116]

But Kautilya also suggests that an elephant forest could be created:

> At the frontier, he [the king] should establish an elephant forest guarded by forest people.[117]

These forests should be placed under the protection of the superintendent of the elephant forests (the *nāgavanādhyakṣa*). Forest guards should kill anyone who kills an elephant here.[118] This clearly indicates that the elephant forests were conceived of as forest reserves for the state, and private access was restricted. The reason for recommending an elephant forest on the borders of the kingdom is no doubt because it constitutes an important resource for the military defense of the kingdom. It also has to do with the great value of ivory: Kautilya recommends that a reward should be given to a person bringing in a pair of tusks of an elephant dying naturally.

Elephants were a resource that had to be documented, and Kautilya recommends an elephant census:

> The wardens of the elephant forests, helped by elephant keepers, foot chainers, border guards, forest people, and attendants, their odors suppressed by the smearing of elephant urine and dung, their bodies concealed under branches of the Bhallatiki tree, moving about with five or seven female elephants acting as lures, should ascertain the size of elephant herds through clues in the form of [the elephants'] sleeping places, footprints, dung and damage caused to river banks. They should maintain a written record of elephants—of those moving in a herd or moving alone, those detached from a herd or the leader of a herd, whether vicious, in *must,* a cub, or released from captivity.[119]

The *Arthashastra* has a whole section that focuses on the material forests and forest produce (the latter is referred to as *kupya, kupya-varga,* or *araṇya-jāta*).[120] The material forests should also be carefully guarded. Penalties should be imposed on those cutting them, except in situations of emergency, and fines are laid down for the

misappropriation or forced seizure of forest produce. Forest produce is in certain places grouped with articles of small value; but elsewhere, it is included among the precious items to be received into the treasury. Kautilya recommends that it should be stored in channels in the fort or in storehouses in the southwestern part of the city, along with the armory.

Kautilya gives a long list of types of forest produce, citing specific examples of each category.[121] This includes certain specific varieties of trees with hard wood; reeds; creepers; fiber-plants; material for ropes; leaves; flowers and medicinal plants. Several types of poison, serpents, and insects are listed to be stored in jars. Forest produce includes metals, vessels, charcoal husks, and ashes. Also included in the list are enclosures or enclosed grounds for animals, birds, wood, and grass. Apart from the expected resources, we see the commodification of the body parts (skin, bones, bile, tendons, eyes, teeth, horns, hooves, and tails) of certain animals—lizard, *seraka* (perhaps a porpoise), leopard, bear, river dolphin (*śiṅśumāra*), lion, tiger, elephant, buffalo, *camara* (yak?), *sṛmara* (probably a kind of deer), rhinoceros, wild cattle, *gayals*, other kinds of deer, birds, and wild animals.[122] Some of these, for instance, elephant tusks and rhinoceros horn, have clear economic value. Animal body parts, especially eyes, are mentioned later by Kautilya as items used in black magic.[123]

Metals, too, are included in the list of forest produce, and the ones mentioned specifically are iron, copper, steel, lead, tin, *vaikṛntaka* (?) and brass.[124] The inclusion of these metals in the list of forest produce should be read along with the importance of mines as a source of revenue in the *Arthashastra,* and points to yet another reason why the wilderness is so important in the text. The mention of enclosures for deer, wild animals, birds, fuel, and grass suggests that the term *kupya* refers to more than forest produce, and also includes certain spaces associated with the forest.[125]

As mentioned above, Kautilya connects the different kinds of forest resources with factories that should be made *outside and inside* the forest by the officer in charge of forest produce *for ensuring the livelihood and the protection of the city.*[126] By connecting the forest, forest produce, commodity production, and the city's welfare and, in fact, stating that the city's welfare is *dependent* on these factories, Kautilya offers an insight into an important aspect of the economic relationship between the forest and the city. The reference to the

protection of the city presumably refers to the forest as a source of material needed for the army, such as weapons and armor, a point that is elaborated on in the immediately following section on the superintendent of the armory. Wood and horn are used for bows; animal sinews for bow strings; iron, bone, and wood for the tips of arrows. The skin, hooves, and / or horns of certain animals are useful for armor. The dolphin, rhinoceros, *dhenuka* (wild cattle or buffalo), elephant and bull are mentioned in this context. It is because the forest is the supplier of various militarily useful materials that the superintendent of the armory should be conversant with various issues concerning the undertaking, use, fraud, gain, loss, and expenditure of various types of forest produce.[127]

But while the state has a special interest in forest produce, not all of it is under the king's control. We hear of various kinds of forest people engaged in the forest for their livelihood. Kautilya states that the king in dire financial straits should purchase one-fourth of the farmers' grains, after making allowances for seeds and livelihood, but that he should exempt forest produce and the property of a Brahmana learned in the Veda. The statement that he should not make demands on various regions including material and elephant forests, or on the forest produce, or on the property of a learned Brahmana suggests that forest produce was considered a sensitive area and was given a privileged position. Such statements also indicate that the forest was not entirely a royal monopoly.

In some places in the *Arthashastra,* the description of the wild animal forest, *mṛga-vana,* suggests that it refers to a forest abounding in wild animals in general, again clearly under some level of state control. There are three types of forests with wild animals. The first type is the game forest, a place of royal sport, and Kautilya is a strong votary of the benefits of the royal hunt. After discussing the relative merits of hunting vis-à-vis gambling, Kautilya states,

> But in hunting [*mṛgayā*] there is exercise, elimination of phlegm, bile, fat, and perspiration; practice in hitting moving and stationary targets; and the understanding of the mind of animals when they are angry, afraid, and at ease; and [only] occasional marching.[128]

On occasion, such hunts can serve political ends. For instance,

elephant hunts and horse sales are described as useful occasions to bring problematic *sāmantas* (neighboring rulers) under control.[129] But the dangers of violence to the king—from thieves, wild animals, and enemies—posed by the forest and hunting were also recognized.

The second type of wild animal forest is a sanitized game park, where the king hunts for recreation, but where the natural dangers normally found in a forest have been carefully removed.

> He should have an animal park [*mṛga-vana*] established for the king's pleasure [*vihāra*] … one with a single entrance, protected by a moat, containing shrubs and bushes bearing delicious fruit, trees without thorns, shallow pools of water, tame deer and other animals, wild animals with their claws and teeth removed, and male and female elephants and elephant cubs useful for the hunt."[130]

The third type are the animal sanctuaries:

> And he should establish on its border [that of the sanitized game park] or on suitable land, another animal park [*mṛga-vana*] where all animals are guests.[131]

The reference to animals being treated as guests suggests that they are protected, and are not to be injured or killed. These seem to be the same as the sanctuaries (*abhaya-vanas*) mentioned elsewhere. In these sanctuaries, the highest fine is to be imposed on those killing or causing any kind of injury to animals, birds, and fish that have been declared inviolable. For householders who commit this crime, the middle fine should be imposed. Perhaps a distinction is made here between those who injure or kill animals for profit and those who do so for subsistence. The king is urged to take steps to prevent injury to animals in sanctuaries in case they stray onto someone's land; utmost care should be taken not to hurt them when they are removed from there, and fines should be imposed in case they are hurt in the process. Kautilya also recommends that one-sixth of birds and deer injured in other areas should be released into the sanctuaries.[132]

Both the sanitized game parks and the sanctuaries are unnatural spaces. We hear of royal hunting parks in ancient Persia and China.

For instance, the Shanglin game park established by the second-century BCE Chinese emperor Wudi was apparently over two hundred Chinese miles in circumference and was extremely elaborately planned.[133] But the ideas of the sanitized game forest and animal sanctuary are quite different from hunting parks.

Mṛga can refer to wild animals in general or to deer, and there are places in the *Arthashastra* where *mṛga-vana* seems to mean deer forest.[134] While comparing *mṛga-vanas* with elephant forests, Kautilya states that in the former, *mṛga* (here, clearly deer), being plentiful in number, yield the benefit of abundant meat and skins, cause little trouble in the matter of their fodder, and are easy to control. Elephants, on the other hand, are the opposite: When they are caught, and especially if they are rogues, they can lead to the ruin of the country. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties they present in terms of control, there is no doubt that Kautilya considers the elephant forests as being of far greater importance to the state than the wild animal forests, because economic and military resources were much more important than royal recreation or animal protection.

Kautilya's discussion of the forest advocates aggressive state exploitation and control of the forest spaces, which would have involved conflict with the native inhabitants of these spaces and their livelihoods. The king's killing of the animals of the forest for sport is also strongly justified and approved. The state's coercive power is implicit in the *Arthashastra*'s entire discussion of the forest.

This coercive aspect emerges more clearly in Kautilya's discussion of the forest people. The people associated with the forest include those who live in the forest, those who regularly pass through it, and those who come there occasionally. The terms *araṇyacara* and *vanacara* are used frequently for people living in or moving around in forests. The term *āṭavika* is usually used for politically problematic forest chieftains or peoples, but not always. For instance, when Kautilya advises the king to settle the *āṭavika*s in the material forests, and to employ them for guarding the elephant forests on the border, he seems to be referring to forest people in general.[135] People regularly passing through the forest include members of trade caravans, herders, those living in *āśrama*s, hunters and fowlers,[136] and wandering minstrels. The state has to exercise strict surveillance on all people living in or moving through the forest; the ubiquitous spies should move around disguised as forest dwellers.

There is a recognition that the lifestyle of the regular forest dwellers is different from that of others. Kautilya states that transactions carried out in the forest are considered invalid unless they are concluded by forest dwellers.[137] This is why they should be made to pay less than others for certain offenses such as the theft or killing of cocks, ichneumons (a kind of mongoose), cats, dogs, or pigs.[138] An officer called the *vivītādhyakṣa* should ensure the livelihood of those inhabiting the material forests and elephant forests. The dangers posed by the forest account for the fact that traders traveling through the forest (*kāntāra*) or across the sea (*samudra*) should be charged higher than the normal rate of interest.[139]

The forest is violent place. It is an abode of robbers, wild animals, fowlers, hunters, and enemies. Forest dwellers are frequently grouped with *caṇḍāla*s, enemies, and *sāmanta*s. The term *caṇḍāla* usually refers to "untouchable" groups considered to be outside the pale of caste society, but also seems to apply to certain tribal communities. Kautilya suggests that secret agents should win the confidence of forest thieves and forest people (*āṭavī*s), instigate them to raid trade caravans, cattle camps, and villages, and then have them killed.[140] From the state's perspective, *āṭavika*s and highway robbers are both afflictions, but the former are more dangerous than the latter

(Kautilya disagrees with the other experts on this point).

> Robbers rob only the negligent, are few in number and easy to identify and capture; forest people [*āṭavikas*], on the other hand, living in their own territory, are many in number and brave, fight in the open, seize and destroy countries, and have the same characteristics as kings.[141]

We have here an acknowledgement of the bravery of the forest tribes. The fact that are put on the same level as kings also acknowledges their potential to *become* kings.

Another positive valuation of the forest people occurs in Kautilya's discussion of the king's protection.[142] When the king rises from bed, he should be surrounded by women guards armed with bows. The second ring of protection around him (in the second hall) should consist of eunuch servants in robes and turbans. The third ring should include hunchbacks, dwarfs, and Kiratas (hunters / tribesmen), and the fourth should consist of his ministers, relatives, and guards armed with spears. The association of Kiratas with physically deformed persons, namely, hunchbacks and dwarfs, is significant and occurs elsewhere, too, in Kautilya's discussion of the people who could be recruited as spies and poisoners.[143]

But forest people are frequently associated with violent rebellion and plunder. Kautilya states that forest people who have come to plunder a village should be scattered into many groups and then destroyed.[144] One of the options for a prince out of favor is to take refuge with a neighboring prince or an *aṭavī*. The desert fort and forest fort are places for the *aṭavīs* or for retreat in time of calamity. In these cases, Kautilya seems to have in mind recalcitrant forest tribes or forest chieftains.

The term *mleccha* (barbarian) is frequently associated with forest people. Kautilya states that a land whose frontiers have many forts beyond them and is never devoid of robber bands or *mleccha* forest people is one with permanent enemies.[145] *Mleccha jātis* and *āṭavīs* are grouped with bands (*śreṇis*) and robber bands, but Kautilya concedes that they are said to have heroic men and that a king who is weak in energy should seek their services.[146] Forest people also have to be negotiated with. Because trade routes pass through the territory of forest chieftains, the king should seek the favor or goodwill (*anugraha*)

of *aṭavīs*, *antapālas*, and chiefs of the city and countryside.[147] This acknowledges the power of the forest chiefs.

The military arm of the state intrudes into the forest, and there are forest forts (*vana-durga*); these are places for forest-dwellers or places of retreat in times of calamity. The forest is one of the places suitable for ambushing the enemy. Kautilya suggests that on the frontiers of his kingdom, the king should erect fortresses of frontier chiefs and that the places in between should be guarded by trappers, Shavaras, Pulindas, *caṇḍālas*, and forest people (*araṇyacaras*). Hunters and fowlers should go around the forest (*araṇya*) and set off alarms at spotting the approach of thieves or enemies. Such statements suggest that although the forest dwellers were a potential source of violence against the state, they could be tamed and harnessed for the protection of the kingdom. Even more significant is the fact that forest troops (*āṭavī-bala / āṭavi-daṇḍa*) are one of the types of troops that can be recruited into the king's army. They are, however, considered the lowest in the military hierarchy as well as in the scale of reliability.

The forest is also associated with asceticism and sacrifice in the *Arthashastra.* On forest land unsuitable for agriculture, the king is advised to make grants of land to ascetics for the study of the Vedas and the performance of sacrifices, promising safety to all that is moving and unmoving therein.[148] This reminds us of the sacrifice-performing sages of many texts, living in *āśramas*, where animals and plants are treated with affection. But the *Arthashastra* introduces us to something different—the idea of inheritable royal grants, known as *brahmadeyas*, free from taxes and fines, that were to be made various kinds of royal priests (*ṛtvij, ācārya, purohita*) and learned Brahmanas. Gifts of land are also recommended for departmental heads, accountants, officials known as the *gopas* and *sthānikas*, elephant trainers, doctors, horse-trainers, couriers; these were minus the rights of sale or mortgage.[149] It is not stated where such gifted land should be located, but it is possible that some of it could have been visualized as situated in the forest. Kautilya recognizes that the giving up of present or future revenue claims over some tracts of land could form a strategy for enhancing the state's political interests. As we have seen, bestowing tax-free land grants became an established strategy for political integration in India for many centuries.

The forest could be a place of refuge, for instance for a son who was not favored by his father. An *amātya* (minister) in disfavor in time

of crisis could resort to the forest. Kautilya also refers to the forest in connection with punishment. He suggests that the elephant and material forests, along with mines and factories, could be used as sites for productive punishment. *Amātyas* who had failed all texts of loyalty could be put to work there.

Kautilya divides beings into humans and nonhumans (that is, animals). Apart from different species, the basic classification of animals consists of wild (*mṛga, vyāla*) and domesticated (*paśu*); big (*mahat*) and small (*kṣudra*); bipeds (*dvipada*) and quadrupeds (*catuśpada*). *Paśu* has a variety of meanings and can refer to animals in general, domesticated ones in particular, or to cattle. *Mṛga* can refer to wild animals as well as deer. Animals are regularly distinguished from birds (*pakṣī*). *Mṛga, paśu,* and *pakṣī* often occur together; they are sometimes accompanied by the term *vyāla,* and on occasion by *matsya* (fish).

Animals are recognized as food, and Kautilya gives guidelines for regulating the quality of animal meat. Butchers should sell boneless, fresh meat of wild and domesticated animals. Certain animals—the calf, bull, and cow—are not to be killed.[150] But Kautilya is more interested in animals as an economic resource. As mentioned above, the body parts of various wild animals are commodified and listed among the produce of the material forests, and special importance is attached to those that are useful for making weapons and armor. Elephants and horses, which had a military importance for the state, are classified according to quality into good, middling, and bad. Distinctions are made between animals owned by the state and those owned by others, including temples (the latter attract special consideration). In the *Arthashastra,* high-ranking officials and the king ride on elephants, horses, or chariots.

Kautilya visualizes domesticated animals as a source of income for the state. Animal herds include cows and buffaloes, goats, sheep, donkeys, camels, horses, and mules. The state maintains herds under the supervision of designated officials. Cowherds taking care of state-owned cattle herds should ensure that the cattle enter water after mud and crocodiles have been removed from it; the animals should be sent to graze in forests where dangers from thieves, wild animals, and enemies have been removed by fowlers and hunters. Very harsh punishments are prescribed for those violating royal herds; anyone who kills or steals cattle from the king's herd, or incites someone to do so, should be put to death. Apart from being a source of income, domesticated animals are also an item of state expenditure. Enclosures for herds of various types of animals and stores for fuel and grass are

included in the corpus of state expenditure. The care of animals under state control, especially their food intake, should be carefully regulated. The food rations of elephants, horses, buffaloes, camels, goats, rams, and donkeys are indicated, but so are those for deer, boar, swans, herons, and peacocks, and it is suggested that estimates should be made for other wild and domesticated animals and birds.[151] It is not clear why this is so, unless it is just for the purposes of compiling comprehensive data that covers all kinds of animals.

As mentioned earlier, elephants are the most important animal for the state, and they are therefore the most important animal in the *Arthashastra*. Kautilya repeatedly emphasizes that good elephants are vital for military victories. Two sections of the work are devoted to elephants under state care.[152] Kautilya distinguishes between elephants under training, those used in war, those used for riding, and rogue elephants. These are grouped into smaller, somewhat artificial categories, no doubt in line with the classificatory ethos of the text. There is also reference to elephants used in hunting. Provisions for the care of elephants are discussed, including the size and layout of the stables, accoutrements, attendants, food rations, and exercise. The best, middling, and worst elephants are described according to dimensions attained at a specific age.

Ivory is an important resource provided by elephants, and it is mentioned among commodities at various places in the *Arthashastra*. Kautilya gives instructions on how often and how much of an elephant's tusks should be cut, differentiating in this context between elephants from the river banks and those from the mountains. He states that the tusk should be cut leaving a length double the circumference at the root; this should be done every two and a half years for elephants from the river banks and every five years for those from the mountainous areas.[153] This is exactly what Varahamihira recommended several centuries later in his encyclopedic *Brihatsamhita*.[154]

As it was not economical to breed elephants, elephant capture was the preferred mode of procuring them for human use. So it is not surprising that Kautilya discusses the capture of elephants.[155] He tells us that the best time to catch them is in summer, and the best age to catch them is when they are twenty years old. Those not to be caught include a cub, an elephant with small or no tusks, a diseased one, a pregnant female, or one suckling her young. Kautilya emphasizes the importance of training elephants. Disagreeing with other authorities,

he asserts that many dull elephants are better than a few brave ones. However, he recognizes that elephants can be both an asset and a calamity, for rogue elephants can ruin the country.[156] An interesting detail is Kautilya's laying down the width of paths for elephants, cattle, and small animals, depending on their size, in order to facilitate the movement of animal herds.[157]

Horses are next in importance as a military resource for the state, and the *Arthashastra* discusses the sources of the best, middling, and worst ones.[158] They are divided into those used in war and those used for riding. The best ones come from various places in the northwest and Vanayu (Arabia). There is a discussion of the layout of stables, the types of horses' leaps and strides, the provision of veterinarians for horses, and the various attendants who are to care for state-owned horses under the supervision of the officer known as the *aśvādhyakṣa*. The care of horses includes regulating their food intake (there are prescriptions for the rations for pregnant mares, foals, and different types of adult horses), their accoutrements, bathing, perfumes, and garlands. The importance of elephant trainers and horse-trainers is indicated by Kautilya's recommendation that they be given land grants (minus the rights of sale and mortgage), along with certain other officials.

In the Kautilyan state, if private individuals steal or harm wild animals living in state sanctuaries, they should be punished.[159] The *sūnādhyakṣa* should impose the highest fine on one who binds, kills, or hurts deer, animals, birds, or fish that have been declared to be inviolable in the sanctuaries (*abhaya-vanas*).[160] The middle fine is to be imposed on householders who commit such offenses in sanctuary enclosures (this may have to do with their performing these acts for subsistence). A fine of 26 3 / 4 *paṇas* should be imposed on those who bind, kill, or hurt fish and birds whose killing is not customary, and twice that amount in the case of deer and other animals (it is possible that this may refer to animals outside the sanctuaries). As for those animals whose killing is customary, and which are not protected in the sanctuaries, the *sūnādhyakṣa* should take one-sixth part of the killed fish and birds, and one-tenth part more duty of deer and other animals. One-sixth of the living birds and deer should be released into the sanctuaries. Kautilya also lists certain fish and birds that are protected from all kinds of injury (presumably in the sanctuaries), along with other auspicious birds and animals. Harming them invites the lowest fine. Although the act of listing species reminds us of

Ashoka's list in pillar edict 5, the only species that appears in both lists is the parrot.

The *Arthashastra* is aware of the problems that can be posed by the violence of animals toward each other in animal sanctuaries. Harmful animals that live in the animal sanctuaries should not be killed there, but should be bound or killed in other places. This suggests that there should be no violation of the animal sanctuary under any circumstances. There are also references to the possibility of cattle herds, oppressed by wild animals, interfering with the activity on trade routes. Wild animals, snakes, and rats are among the list of eight dangers (*mahābhayas*).[161] Dangers from locusts, birds, insects, crocodiles, and snakes are also mentioned. Ways of dealing with them include practical measures for killing them (getting cats and ichneumons to kill rats); using *mantras* and Atharvan remedies; propitiation through worship on special days; and ingenious ideas such as imposing a tax on rats. The protection of animals that kill pests is also discussed, and there is a fine for catching or killing pest-killing cats and ichneumons (except in the case of forest dwellers).

Accompanying the solicitude toward animals is a clinical regulation of their killing. The Kautilyan state kills animals for profit, but this killing is carefully supervised and regulated. The officer known as the *samāhartā* deals, among his other duties, with animal slaughter. However, there is a special officer—the *sūnādhyakṣa*—who deals exclusively with supervising animal killing. That the state profits from animal slaughter is indicated by Kautilya's statement that the state can claim a share of the slaughtered animals (of those whose slaughter is permissible)—one-sixth part of fish and birds; one-tenth part additionally of wild and domesticated animals, in addition to a duty (*śulka*).[162] This is followed by a statement that one-sixth of the live birds and wild animals obtained thus should be released into the animal sanctuaries.[163] One can speculate about the significance of this statement: Just as the subjects had to give a certain share of their grain to the king, was the king required to offer a share of the animal resources of his kingdom to nature?

Kautilya considers privately owned animals as a source of income for the state. He prescribes various taxes on animal owners and a high tax on horse dealers. The state profits from violence against privately owned animals, levying fines for their theft, harming, and killing. Crimes that invite fines include stealing deer, animals, birds, wild animals, or fish caught by others; theft of deer or objects from the

material forests; theft or killing of deer or birds meant for show or pleasure. The punishments for stealing or killing a big animal are double those for a small animal, and include the harsh one of cutting off of the offender's feet. Even more violent punishments are prescribed for stealing royal animals such as an elephant or horse (or chariot) belonging to a king; they range from impaling on a stake to death. Death is also prescribed for stealing a herd of (presumably royal) cattle.

By and large, the injunctions against killing animals in the *Arthashastra* seem to stem not from an ethical imperative but from a pragmatic one related to the consideration of animals as economic resources and property from the perspective of private individuals and, even more so, the state. The gravity of the crime of stealing, injuring, or killing animals has to do with the size and value of the commodity and to whom it belongs. So stealing or killing an animal from the king's herd or inciting someone to do so invites death.

But there are a few places in the *Arthashastra* where Kautilya seems to go beyond pragmatic concerns in his discussion of the welfare of animals. We have already noted the idea of animal sanctuaries. The eight "great dangers" (*mahābhayas*) include diseases of domesticated animals, which should be countered by propitiatory rites and the worship of deities. In his discussion of horses under state care, Kautilya asserts that those incapacitated by war, disease, or old age should receive food for maintenance and those no longer fit to be used in war should be used as stud stallions. Similarly, he recommends that veterinarians should treat elephants suffering as a result of a long journey, disease, work, rut, or old age. Fines are prescribed for those not taking proper care of elephants under state care, including one for hitting an elephant in an improper place. Fines are also laid down for riding a temple animal, a stud bull, or a pregnant cow. Pregnant females or those with young are singled out for special consideration. Hurting animals is punishable. For instance, the *hiṁsā* caused by a driver driving a bullock cart with a broken nose string or yoke invites a fine.[164] While such glimmers of compassion toward animals extend beyond the utilitarian frame, Kautilya's general perspective is a pragmatic one, where the chief aim is maximizing economic gain from animals, especially for the state. Ensuring their welfare is to some extent essential for this. This is what leads to a range of negative and positive injunctions that are as, if not more, impressive than Ashoka's.

Animals appear in other roles as well in the *Arthashastra.* They can

protect the king against the violence of others by virtue of being portents and alerts to danger; for instance, certain types of birds and animals that kill snakes indicate the presence of poison in the palace and in the horse stables. Animal body parts, urine, and excreta can be used to test the impurity of metals. Animal imagery is also used occasionally by Kautilya. For instance, just as fish swimming about in water cannot be detected when drinking water, similarly the officers known as *yukta*s cannot be detected when misappropriating money. Even the path of birds flying in the sky can be known, but not the ways of *yukta*s moving around with concealed intentions. When the king errs in private, his teachers and ministers should prick him with the (elephant) goad (*pratoda*) in the form of the shadow (of the sundial) or the *nālikā* (the water clock)—that is, by telling him the proper time for doing things. This indirect reference is the closest we get in the *Arthashastra* to the king being compared with the most important of all animals in the text—the elephant.[165]

In certain places in the *Arthashastra,* the forest is associated with the idea of marking borders or frontiers of the kingdom, but in most other places, it is spoken of as part—and a very important one—of the kingdom. From the perspective of the *Arthashastra,* the forest is a dangerous and potentially violent and volatile space, mostly on account of the forest dwellers and other undesirable sorts of people living there. But it is integrated into the kingdom as a valuable economic and military resource, and Kautilya engages with the forest and its inhabitants—human and animal—in unprecedented and unparalleled detail. The *Arthashastra*'s bold envisioning of the forest recognizes it as an economic resource that involves a massive deployment and use of the state's coercive, entrepreneurial, and managerial potential; as a military resource that has to be exploited and protected; as a place inhabited by dangerous, violent people who can be tamed and harnessed to serve the political interests of the king; and as a site for the ostentatious display of the king's great hunting prowess.

Kamandaka's Critique of the Royal Hunt

Several centuries later, the forest still loomed large in the mind of political theorists. Kamandaka's *Nitisara* does not discuss different kinds of forests in as much detail because his work deals with statecraft and not so much with political economy. Kautilya's classification of forests is absent here, although there is a brief mention of forests and elephant enclosures among the sources of state income.[166] But there are many references to forest people as part of the army, and there is a discussion of the royal hunt.

From the political point of view, the forest is a lucrative, but problematic space. Elephant enclosures / forests (*kujñara-bandhana*) and regular forests (*vana*) are two of the eight sources of state income mentioned by Kamandaka, and elephants are greatly prized for their role in war. But the intransigence and violence of forest people poses a political problem. Forest-dwellers (*āṭavikas*) are by nature impious, greedy, uncultured, and untrustworthy. Potentially threatening to the king are those only partially integrated into the circle of kings—*sāmantas* (bordering rulers) and *āṭavikas* (forest dwellers), who are frequently mentioned in the same breath. In the *Nitisara,* the term *sāmanta* does not have the connotations of a subordinate feudatory, which it acquired in later times. Forest-troops (*āraṇyaka / āṭavika bala*) have to be used by the king in his military campaigns, but they are even more unreliable than troops alienated from the enemy camp.[167]

As in the *Arthashastra,* forest folk appear in more positive roles as well. The harem was one of the most dangerous places for the king, and its members were to be watched over by spies and specially designated officers. Like Kautilya, Kamandaka suggests that the king should move about the harem escorted by daring, armored, and turbaned hunch-backs (*kubjas*), hunters (*kirātas*), and dwarfs (*vāmanas*).[168] The inclusion of hunters as protectors of the king may have been on account of their bravery and ferocity.

One of the most significant aspects of the *Nitisara* is its attitude toward the royal hunt, an activity that was considered by Kautilya as integral to kingship. The dangers of the "calamity of the march" (*yāna-vyasana*), described in the *Nitisara* just before those of the "calamity of the hunt" (*mṛgayā-vyasana*), appear to apply to both.[169]

These include the physical strain resulting from prolonged riding, accidental fall or injury, and the loss of horses or chariots. Further, there is the suffering caused by hunger, thirst, exhaustion, severe cold, storm, heat, and wastage of resources. Traveling through areas that are very hot, sandy, or thorny, or dense forests infested with prickly creepers and shrubs, or hilly areas prone to falling boulders, or tracks that are uneven due to stones, earthen mounds, and ant hills—all this causes the king much distress. Violent enemies may lurk among rocks, rivers, or forests, and there is the possibility of his sudden capture or death at the hands of *sāmanta*s, *āṭavika*s, and others.

> Being killed by his own soldiers, kinsmen or enemies; and the fear of bears, pythons, wild elephants, lions and tigers; and wandering about lost due to the pervading smoke of forest fires —these are the various kinds of [dangers associated with] the vice of hunting for kings.[170]

According to Kamandaka, these potential dangers can to some extent be neutralized by ensuring that the king rides on the back of a swift but easily controlled animal, by having the outskirts of the forest carefully examined and protected against all dangers, and by ensuring that forest interiors are well lit and rendered free of ferocious animals.[171] But this is not the end of the matter. Kamandaka recognizes hunting, along with womanizing, drinking, and gambling, as royal vices. But while he is willing to accept moderate levels of indulgence in women and drink, he asserts that gambling and hunting should be shunned as far as possible. Apart from the physical dangers it entails for the king, Kamandaka's objections to hunting are also based on the fact that it could lead to the king wasting his precious time, and that any kind of addiction weakened his character.

Kamandaka lists the various supposed benefits of hunting.[172] He cites the view that it provides the king with physical exercise, which leads to his developing endurance and immunity from indigestion, heaviness, and susceptibility to colds. Another argument in favor of hunting is that it develops skill and excellence in hitting stationary or moving targets with arrows. These are, in fact, precisely the arguments made by Kautilya in the *Arthashastra*. But Kamandaka firmly refutes them all, asserting that all these benefits can be obtained through other means. For instance, maladies such as

indigestion can be remedied through regular physical exercise, and marksmanship in archery by practicing with artificial targets.[173] After citing the alleged benefits of the royal hunt, Kamandaka rejects them all, making a moral argument:

> These are said to be the benefits of hunting [but] that is not acceptable. Due to its inherent evils of taking life [*doṣāḥ prāṇaharāḥ*], it is a great vice [*vyasanaṁ mahat*].[174]

Kamandaka also suggests hunting in a sanitized forest as an alternative to the conventional royal hunt. We have noted that Kautilya also refers to this option, though more briefly.[175]

> If he [the king] wants to engage in the sport of hunting, a beautiful game forest [*mṛgāraṇya*] should be laid out on the outskirts of the city for the pleasure of sport [*krīḍā*] alone.[176]

Kamandaka then describes the features of this special game forest. It should be located just outside the town (presumably the capital city), should be over half a *yojana* in length and breadth, and should be surrounded by a ditch and ramparts so that the animals cannot escape. It should be situated at the foot of a hill or next to a river, and should have plentiful supplies of water and grass. It should not have thorny creepers, shrubs, or poisonous plants. Any crevices in the ground should be filled up with earth and gravel, and the surface should be leveled by removing stumps of trees, mounds of earth, and rocks. It should be made attractive with well-known flower-bearing and fruit-bearing trees, which can provide pleasing, thick, cool shade. The pools in this park should be shallow, abounding in flowers and birds of different species, and cleared of ferocious aquatic animals. The park should have beautiful creepers laden with flowers and leaves, both inside and on the sides of the surrounding ditch. It should be provided with animals such as she-elephants and their young ones, tigers, and other big game with their teeth and nails removed, and horned animals whose horns had been broken. A space outside the park should be cleared of trees and pillars, and the ground should be leveled, so that it was inaccessible to enemy forces and enhanced the feeling of comfort for the king. The park should be guarded by

trustworthy forest people who were resolute, hardy, painstaking, and conversant in the moods of wild animals. The king's own men, of boundless energy and experienced in hunting, should introduce various wild animals into this park. The king could then enter it for sport, accompanied by a select group of trusted attendants, without detriment to his other duties. As he entered, fully armed soldiers should carefully stand guard outside, vigilant for the slightest signs of danger to their royal master.

In his detailed description of an artificial, sanitized game forest for the royal hunt, Kamandaka offers a compromise between the royal predilection for hunting and the dangers and problems that this activity entailed. In spite of describing this option, it is noteworthy that Kamandaka disapproves of hunting not only on pragmatic grounds—namely, the physical danger to the king and the possibility that this activity might lead him to neglect his royal duties. He also objects to it on two moral grounds—that it weakens the king's character and it involves violence against animals. The second argument indicates that it is not the king's *excessive* hunting alone that is considered a problem by Kamandaka; the royal hunt itself is problematic because of the fact that it does violence to animals. This stand against an activity conventionally associated with the king's prowess and prestige can be connected with Kamandaka's reservations about war.

The Forest in Early Sanskrit *Kāvya:* Bhasa

Although Sanskrit literature was captivated by the city, it remained strongly attracted to the pull of the wilderness. In Bhasa's plays, the forest is, as in the epics, a place of hunting, exile, *āśrama*s, and the renunciation of kings. Various terms (*vana, araṇya, aṭavi, kānana*) are used, and not apparently in any significantly different sense. There is the generic forest, and there are also specific forests—Nagavana and Venuvana are mentioned in the *Pratijnayaugandharayana* (the former could also refer to a generic elephant forest).

Bhasa frequently contrasts the forest and city. In the *Pratima,* prince Bharata observes that since he has been abandoned by his father and brother, Ayodhya has become like a forest to him. When Rama returns to Janasthana after defeating Ravana and rescuing Sita, on hearing the sounds of conches and kettledrums, he remarks that the forest has become a city. As in the *Ramayana,* Ayodhya is where Rama is. In an interesting departure from the Valmiki *Ramayana,* Rama's consecration ceremony takes place not in Ayodhya but in an *āśrama* in Janasthana, and the whole forest is illuminated and bright like the sun.

The forest is associated with the borders of the kingdom. In the *Pratijnayaugandharayana,* the minister Rumanvat tells king Udyayana that the border areas (*viṣayāntarāṇi*) are inhabited by people of low birth and devoid of shame; hence the king must be careful and should go into the forest accompanied by his army, never alone. Forest people appear infrequently in Bhasa's plays. There is passing reference to the cowherd girls in the *Balacharita,* their hands placed on tresses heavy with forest flowers, suggesting an association of cowherds with the forest. The most detailed description of the forest and a forest dweller is in the *Madhyamavyayoga.* Here, the forest is lovely, dark, and dense, thronging with birds and wild animals, and with many *āśrama*s where sages perform their sacrifices. But it is also haunted by demons, a dangerous place, not fit to live in, except for the brave. Bhasa employs a great deal of animal imagery and analogy in this play. For instance, he describes Ghatotkacha, the son of the Pandava Bhima and a demoness who lives in the forest, as having a lion-like face and teeth, an eagle nose, an elephant chin, and the gait of a bull and elephant.[177]

The royal hunt figures in several plays. In the *Dutavakya,* Duryodhana refers to the Pandavas' father having committed an offense while hunting, due to which he was cursed by a sage (this is part of the epic story). In the *Svapnavasavadatta,* king Udayana has gone hunting when his minister Yaugandharayana spreads the word that he (the minister) and the queen Vasavadatta have died in a fire in his absence, as part of his strategy to restore the king's lost fortune. The most dramatic event related to the royal hunt occurs in the *Pratijnayaugandharayana.* Here, king Udayana of Vatsa is hunting in the forest when a soldier tells him about the nearby presence of a blue elephant named Nilakuvalaya. This is part of a plot hatched by the enemy king Pradyota of Avanti. Udayana says that he had read about this *cakravartin* of elephants in the elephant treatises. Dismissing his minister's protestations, the king dismounts from his horse Nilabalaha (Blue Cloud) and mounts his elephant Sundarapatala (Beautiful Reed). He reduces his military entourage, and takes his musical instrument along—he hopes to attract the blue elephant though his music! In a twist that reminds us of the Trojan horse episode, it turns out that the elephant is not a real but an artificial one, containing enemy soldiers, who emerge and capture the king.

Monkeys naturally play an important role in the *Abhisheka,* which is based on the *Ramayana* story. The episode of the killing of Vali includes an interesting discussion on the nature of animals versus their obligation to follow dharma. As mentioned earlier, the *vānaras* are no ordinary monkeys but divinities in animal form, enjoined with a divine mission. Vali protests that adultery is part of the dharma (here to be understood as custom) of the *vānaras*. But Rama admonishes him, and tells him that although Vali's younger brother Sugriva had seduced his (Vali's) wife, under no circumstances was it proper for an elder brother to have sexual relations with his younger brother's wife. And as king of the *vānaras*, Vali should not have behaved like a wild animal; he should have known the difference between dharma and adharma.[178]

Elsewhere in Bhasa's plays, the animal that dominates is the elephant, and it figures both in the forest and in the city. As mentioned above, in the *Pratijnayaugandharayana,* a blue elephant is central to the plot to capture king Udayana; it is also part of his minister's strategy to ensure his release. Certain elephants (and horses) are mentioned by name in this play; for instance, the elephant Bhadravati is described as essential for princess Vasavadatta's water

sport. In the *Avimaraka,* the hero Avimaraka demonstrates his prowess by saving the princess from an elephant running amok, impressing her enormously. In the *Charudatta,* an elephant attacks an ascetic in the course of the play. The *Karnabhara* has many references to elephants and horses, including the fabulous horses of Kamboja. Karna offers the god Indra gifts of many cows, Kamboja horses that bring good luck to kings, and enemy-destroying elephants—all of which the god rejects.

The lion and elephant are the animals that are mentioned most often in Bhasa's poetic descriptions of royalty. In the *Pratijnayaugandharayana,* Udyota is said to be "like a lion captured for sacrifice, burning with rage." In the *Pratima,* on hearing of Rama's impending departure to the forest, Dasharatha rushes in "like an elephant withered with age." Prince Bharata's voice is described as "gentle and melodious as that of a rutting bull." In the *Abhisheka,* Hanuman sees Ravana as he "strides about in a joyful gait like an elephant in rut," and moves about surrounded by young women "like a lion in the midst of a group of gazelles." Even monkey kings are compared with elephants; Sugriva describes Vali as "a noble monkey with an elephant's gait." When approached by Ravana, Sita is in deep distress "like a deer sighted by a lion."[179] Ravana arrogantly asserts that Rama is no danger to him:

> "How can the long-maned lion
> ever be killed by a deer?
> Or the mighty elephant in rut
> Be killed by a jackal?"[180]

Raising his mighty golden bow in the midst of showers of arrows in the battlefield, Rama, seated in his chariot, moves against Ravana like a tiger pouncing against an elephant in rut.

The hermitage in the forest (*tapovana*) is the place where the action starts in the *Svapnavasavadatta.* Bhasa describes the deer, trees, cows, and the smoke arising from the sacrificial altars. This is the typical description of the forest hermitage that we have already seen in the epics. The royals are conspicuous and out of place. The heroine Vasavadatta and princess Padmavati meet in a hermitage, and the minister Yaugandharayana, disguised as an ascetic, takes charge and engineers a series of events that propel the plot forward. The intrusion of outsiders who are not sensitive to the *āśrama* ethos can alter it in a

major way. Royalty should not disturb the *āśrama,* but princess Padmavati and her entourage (figuratively) turn the peaceful hermitage into a noisy village. In fact, the soldiers accompanying the princess are described as harassing the inhabitants and pushing them around. The chamberlain intervenes and tells them not to behave in this fashion lest they bring scandal to the king. The commitment of royalty not to obstruct the activities in the *āśrama* in any way is acknowledged by Padmavati, who describes it as the vow of her family (*kula-vrata*). The idea of the king in particular and royalty in general as protectors of the hermitage is present in Bhasa's plays but it is not emphasized as much as it is in the later works of Kalidasa. And Bhasa also shows a departure from the normative model wherein a royal entourage actually disturbs the peace of the forest hermitage.

The King, *Āśrama,* and Nature in Kalidasa's Works

Kalidasa's great skill in weaving evocative poetic descriptions of nature is most vividly on display in the *Meghaduta.* This long poem narrates the request made to a passing cloud by a *yakṣa* exiled on Ramagiri Mountain in the Vindhyas. The request is to deliver his message to his beloved, who lives in Alaka, capital of the god Kubera. The Purvamegha section of the poem traces the hypothetical journey that the cloud should make from Ramagiri to Alaka, and the Uttaramegha section describes Alaka, where the *yakṣa*'s consort lives, pining for her lover. In the course of the poem, which talks about the pain and longing experienced by separated lovers, Kalidasa maps the terrain between the Vindhyas and Himalayas, focusing especially on mountains, rivers, and cities, and knits together religious and physical geography, nature, and love. In the *Kumarasambhava,* Kalidasa describes Mount Kailasha, the abode of the god Shiva as well as the locus of the goddess Parvati's austerities in the forest. But among Kalidasa's works, the most detailed treatment of the relationship between kingship and the wilderness occurs in the *Abhijnanashakuntala* and *Raghuvamsha.*

The forest and the royal hunt are central to the *Abhijnanashakuntala. Vana* and *araṇya* (and the less frequent *aṭavi*) are used interchangeably in the play.[181] It is not so much the forest as the hermitage in the forest (*āśrama, tapovana*) that is center-stage. Five of the seven acts have an *āśrama* setting; only two are set in the city. Further, while maintaining its profile as a place of austerities and habitation for sages, their students, and families, Kalidasa makes the forest *āśrama* the locus of an erotic encounter. Encounters between kings and beautiful women in forests are common enough in the epic-Puranic tradition; what is new is the poetic detail and beauty with which the encounter is described. The *āśrama,* also referred to as the *dharmāraṇya* (dharma forest), appears to be a cultural half-way house, embodying the city's socio-religious values as well as the forest's association with nature; but Kalidasa also presents it as the antithesis of the city and the court. The inhabitants of the *āśrama* and the city palace interact with each other, and when the curse is lifted, there is a harmonious resolution and coming together of the two.

Two *āśrama*s are described in detail in the play. One is that of the sage Kashyapa and the other is that of the divine sage Marichi. The description of Kashyapa's *āśrama* highlights its tranquil atmosphere, the fawns moving around fearlessly among the huts, the smoke rising up from the offering of oblations, the young girls watering the trees, and the rice growing wild. To this, Kalidasa adds the physical beauty of the young women of the hermitage—the protagonist, Shakuntala, and her two friends, Anasuya and Priyamvada, the former grave and sensible, the latter playful and vivacious. The heroine Shakuntala's appeal derives from her beauty, innocence, and closeness to nature. Her girlish charms are bridled by her adherence to social norms, deference to her father, and shy reluctance to give herself to the king. Her beauty is strikingly different from the cultivated beauty of the women in the royal palace. Kalidasa takes the bark garment—that symbol of ascetic life—and adds an erotic touch to it in his description of Shakuntala having to loosen it to accommodate her swelling breasts. Shakuntala muses to herself:

> How is it that on seeing him [king Dushyanta] I experience an agitation inconsistent with the ascetic grove?[182]

Kalidasa's *āśrama* is a place that is to be protected and never disturbed by kings. Its inhabitants live a simple life, free from luxuries, devoted to the performance of sacrifices and the worship of the gods. Some sages, such as Marichi, perform rigorous austerities. The *āśrama* is also tax-free. The king tells us that its inhabitants do not pay a sixth share of their grain to the king, but offer something of far greater and more lasting value: a sixth of the fruits of their austerities, that is, their merit.[183] The social norms of the *āśrama* include hospitality toward guests, and Shakuntala has to pay a heavy price for not showing proper hospitality toward a bad-tempered sage. The women of the *āśrama* are generally subordinate to their fathers and husbands, but Kalidasa also refers to women ascetics such as Gautami. The only element of satire in this otherwise idyllic picture is voiced by the *vidūṣaka,* who makes fun of the bald oily pates of some of the *āśrama* inhabitants.

The *Abhijnanashakuntala* has a great deal to say about the royal hunt, and most of it is negative. The inhabitants of the *āśrama* are presented as protectors of wild animals, and the king as a predator. The play opens with the king making a dramatic entrance as a hunter riding on a chariot driven by a charioteer, his bowstring stretched taut across his bow, in pursuit of a black antelope (*kṛṣṇasāra, sāraṅga*). He is fixing an arrow to his bowstring when the voice of an ascetic (*vaikhānasa*) is heard, saying that the antelope is an animal of the hermitage and must not be killed. On entering, the ascetic contrasts the violent potential of the king's arrow with the frailty of the deer's existence.

> "Therefore replace your well-aimed arrow.
> Your weapon is designed for the protection of those in distress, not for the killing of the innocent."[184]

On hearing these words, the king immediately puts his arrow away. This may be seen as an indication of the contradiction between the king's hunt and the ways of the *āśrama,* and the fact that wild animals are not to be killed there. But the announcement made by the ascetic suggests greater rewards. Dushyanta is rewarded for his restraint by a very important blessing bestowed on him by the ascetic—that he will have a son as virtuous as himself, who will be a *cakravartin.*

Even more significant is a satirical account of the royal hunt given

by the *vidūṣaka* Mathavya. Act 2 begins with him sighing:

> "Oh my fate! I am tired of being friend to this king addicted to the hunt! 'Here is a deer,' 'there is a boar,' 'there is a tiger'—in this manner we wander about from forest to forest [*aṭavi*], in the midst of rows of trees, their shade thinned by summer. We drink hot, foul-smelling water from mountain streams, astringent from their mixture with leaves. We get our meals, mainly consisting of meat roasted on spits, at irregular hours. And even at night, I do not get enough sleep as my joints are dislocated by riding on horseback [during the day]. Then, at the crack of dawn, those sons of slave girls—the fowlers—wake me up with the noise of taking the forest [indicating the resumption of the hunt]."[185]

The *vidūṣaka* wants a break from this tiresome sport and pretends that his limbs are paralyzed. He describes the king coming toward him surrounded by Yavana women, who wear garlands of wild flowers and hold bows in their hands. We are reminded of the Greek accounts of Indian kings hunting in the company of women and Kautilya's reference to women guarding the king's person. Either this was actual practice, or it shows the fantasy of physically powerful but dependable women accompanying the king on the royal hunt, an important political event demonstrating the kings' prowess and mastery, living on in the poetic imagination.

Even more significant is the friendly debate on hunting that ensues between the *vidūṣaka* and the commander in chief (*senāpati*). (Soldiers and the *senāpati* had evidently accompanied the king on his hunt.) The *senāpati* asserts that hunting is wrongly considered a vice (*doṣa*); it has proved very beneficial (a *guṇa*) for king Dushyanta, and has endowed him with strength and endurance. Echoing the political theorists, he highlights the great benefits of the royal hunt:

> "The body becomes light and agile for activity, the waist attenuated due to the reduction of fat;
>
> The heart of animals as they experience fear and anger, is observed;
>
> It is the highest glory for archers when their arrows hit a moving target;
>
> Falsely is hunting said to be a vice [*vyasana*]; where is there a

comparable amusement?”[186]

The *senāpati* urges the king to resume the hunt. The *vidūṣaka* responds not with argument but with great annoyance that the commander in chief is trying to incite the king to hunt when the latter seemed to have come to his senses and had given up the idea. He expresses the hope that the *senāpati* is devoured by a greedy old bear as he chases animals from forest to forest.

King Dushyanta admits that his ardor for hunting has been diminished by the *vidūṣaka*’s critique. He adds that the hunt cannot be resumed because they are close to a hermitage. Further, the king’s encounter with Shakuntala has also affected him profoundly. Whereas he is a killer of deer, she rears one tenderly as if it were her own child. Or perhaps his love for Shakuntala has destroyed his interest in everything else. In a dramatic reversal, Dushyanta is now disinclined to kill the fawns whose glances remind him of his beloved. The royal hunt, once interrupted, is not resumed. The king calls off the forest beaters, tells his attendants to remove their hunting gear, and forbids his soldiers from disturbing the peace of the *āśrama.* The *vidūṣaka* irreverently claims victory over the commander in chief in the debate on the royal hunt. In the *Abhijnanashakuntala,* Kalidasa has presented the royal hunt as a violent act and as an object of derision.

The forest and the *āśrama* are also important in the *Raghuvamsha.* The poem's action moves between the capital city, military marches, the forest, and the *āśrama* in the forest. These four locales are integral to the conceptualization of the essential features of kingship and sovereignty that Kalidasa seeks to convey in this *mahākāvya,* and he knits them into a harmonious and aesthetically edifying whole.

King Dilipa does not enter the forest as a violent hunter. He rides majestically through the forest on his chariot, accompanied by his wife, Sudakshina, on his way to the sage Vasishtha's hermitage. Kalidasa describes the fragrant breeze that scatters flower dust and makes the trees sway, the gaze and the cries of peacocks, the garland formation of *sārasa* birds in flight, and the fragrant lotuses in the ponds. The royal couple is greeted with offerings and blessings in the villages, which are marked by sacrificial posts that had been granted to them (another reference to royal land grants).[187] They do not meet any hunters, but Dilipa and Sudakshina proceed toward the hermitage

> Asking the old herdsmen [*ghoṣa-vṛddhāḥ*], who came with presents of fresh butter, the names of the forest trees on the way.[188]

The king takes great care to ensure that he does not disturb the hermitage and enters it with a minimal entourage.

The forest, its animals, people, and produce figure prominently in Kalidasa's description of Raghu's *digvijaya.* There are horses, but the elephant dominates. As Raghu marches eastward along with his fourfold army, he turns deserts into places full of water, renders rivers navigable, and clears the forests. His passage toward the eastern ocean is marked by defeated kings, just as the path of an elephant is marked by uprooted and broken fruit trees. Raghu crosses the river Kapisha with his army on a bridge made of elephants.

> He planted his irresistible prowess over the summit of Mahendra Mountain as the elephant driver plunges his sharp goad into the head of a stubborn elephant.[189]

The king of Kalinga comes to meet Raghu accompanied by his army of elephants. As Raghu's army marches southward, the river Kaveri is made fragrant with the ichor of elephants. Near Malaya Mountain, the dust of cardamom raised by the hooves of his horses clings to the temples of his raging elephants. The neck chains of the powerful elephants of Raghu's army are tied firmly to sandalwood trees.

We have seen in Chapter 4 that Kalidasa's descriptions of natural landscapes include forests and mountains and their valuable produce. The poet mentions the sandalwood trees of the Malaya and Dardura Mountains; the forests and wild date (*kharjūra*) trees of the Kerala coast; and the bamboo and *bhurja* trees on the banks of the Ganga. The description of Raghu's march up the Himalayas includes mention of the fearless lions living in caves, the minerals of the mountains, and the spray of the river Ganga. After moving to the north, reaching the Sindhu country, and defeating the Hunas and Kambojas, Raghu ascends the Himalayas and fights the mountain tribes and Utsavasamketas. As the military circumambulation draws to a close, Kalidasa mentions the black aloe trees (*kālāgurudruma*) beyond the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) River, and describes the king of Kamarupa as waiting on Raghu and giving him presents of rutting elephants. The aestheticized poetic description of Raghu's *digvijaya* completely masks the violence of the king's intrusion into forest habitats.

As we have seen, political theorists such as Kautilya and Kamandaka had much to say about the *vyasanas* (calamities or vices) that could afflict the various elements of the state, including the four vices to which kings were especially susceptible—namely, hunting, gambling, drinking, and excessive indulgence in women. The *Raghuvamsha* speaks of these vices, dwelling on the problems posed by the royal addiction to hunting and indulgence in women, but not on gambling or drinking. Although Dasharatha is described as not being addicted to the love of hunting, gambling, wine, or women, it turns out he does, in fact, have an inordinate love of women and the hunt. When he desires to hunt, Kalidasa writes that his advisers approved because of the benefits of hunting:

> It imparts skill in hitting moving targets, it gives knowledge of the outward signs of their [animals'] fear and anger;
>
> It improves stamina by conquering fatigue—therefore, with his counselor approving, he [Dasharatha] embarked [on the

hunt].[190]

Again, these are the very benefits of hunting listed in the *Arthashastra* and *Nitisara*.

Even more interesting is the fact that Kalidasa describes Dasharatha as hunting in a sanitized forest, as recommended by Kautilya and Kamandaka:

> Then he entered the forest [*vana*] which men with dogs and nets had entered before him, where fires and barbarians [*dasyus*] had been removed,
>
> where the earth was firm for the tread of horses, where there were water bodies, and which was teeming with deer, birds and wild cattle.[191]

The *Raghuvamsha* alludes to the idea that the king must not kill a wild elephant. The reference occurs in the fifth act, when prince Aja is on his way to princess Indumati's *svayaṁvara*. When the prince is encamped with his army on the banks of the Narmada River, a wild elephant emerges from the river, pungent ichor streaming from his temples. (The elephant is actually Priyamvada, lord of the *gandharvas*, who had been transformed into an elephant due to a sage's curse.) His appearance creates havoc among the animals in the army. The prince raises his bow, but "knowing that a wild elephant should not be killed by a king," he hits him without much force in the temples, to stun him and prevent his advance, and not to kill him. In Kalidasa's works, the forest appears mainly as place of peaceful, idyllic beauty associated with love and the *āśrama*. Kings hunt, but hunting within the precincts of the *āśrama* is a violent act, and a critique of the royal hunt is expressed.

The King's Mastery over the Forest: Epigraphic and Numismatic Expressions

Apart from the texts that we have surveyed, inscriptions also expressed the relationship between the king and the wilderness. The policy of tax-free royal land grants brought into vogue a new kind of political practice and mode of political expression that eventually became widespread throughout the subcontinent. It also introduced new ways of conceptualizing and describing land and space. While some land grants may have involved an encroachment of upwardly mobile Brahmanas into forest areas, the details of the inscriptions suggest that this was not usually the case. In the instances where they were located in the forest, land grants created a new kind of Brahmana settlement known as the *agrahāra* or *brahmadeya.* These villages, presided over by Brahmana landed gentry, were very different from the *āśrama*s of sages described in texts. However, both the *agrahāra* and *āśrama* had a strong relationship with kings.

As in Ashoka's rock edict 13, so in the Allahabad *praśasti,* the forest people are recognized as political enemies. After naming several northern kings of Aryavarta (land of the Aryas) who are said to have been violently exterminated by the Gupta king Samudragupta, line 21 of the inscription states that this great king had made all the kings of the forest (*sarvāṭavika-rāja*) his servants. This terse statement acknowledges the forest chieftains as political adversaries, but the specific naming that occurs in the case of other adversaries is absent. This one phrase glosses over what must have been a series of bloody campaigns. Harishena emphasizes the political subordination of the generic forest chieftains, but it is interesting that unlike the northern kings, who are said to have been violently exterminated, the inscription refers to a vague subordination, not elimination, of the forest tribes.

The king's relationship with the forest is more graphically represented on Gupta coins. As mentioned in Chapter 1, animals make their appearance before humans on ancient Indian coinage. The elephant, humped bull, lion, and horse occur on punch-marked coins and early cast coins. The coins of the Bactrian Greeks show wild animals such as the elephant, lion, and panther. Demetrios I and Demetrios II wear an elephant-scalp head-dress, symbolically

demonstrating their victory over the land of the elephants. This kind of representation is incongruous with the manner in which the king's relationship with the animals of the wild is expressed in the larger Indian tradition.

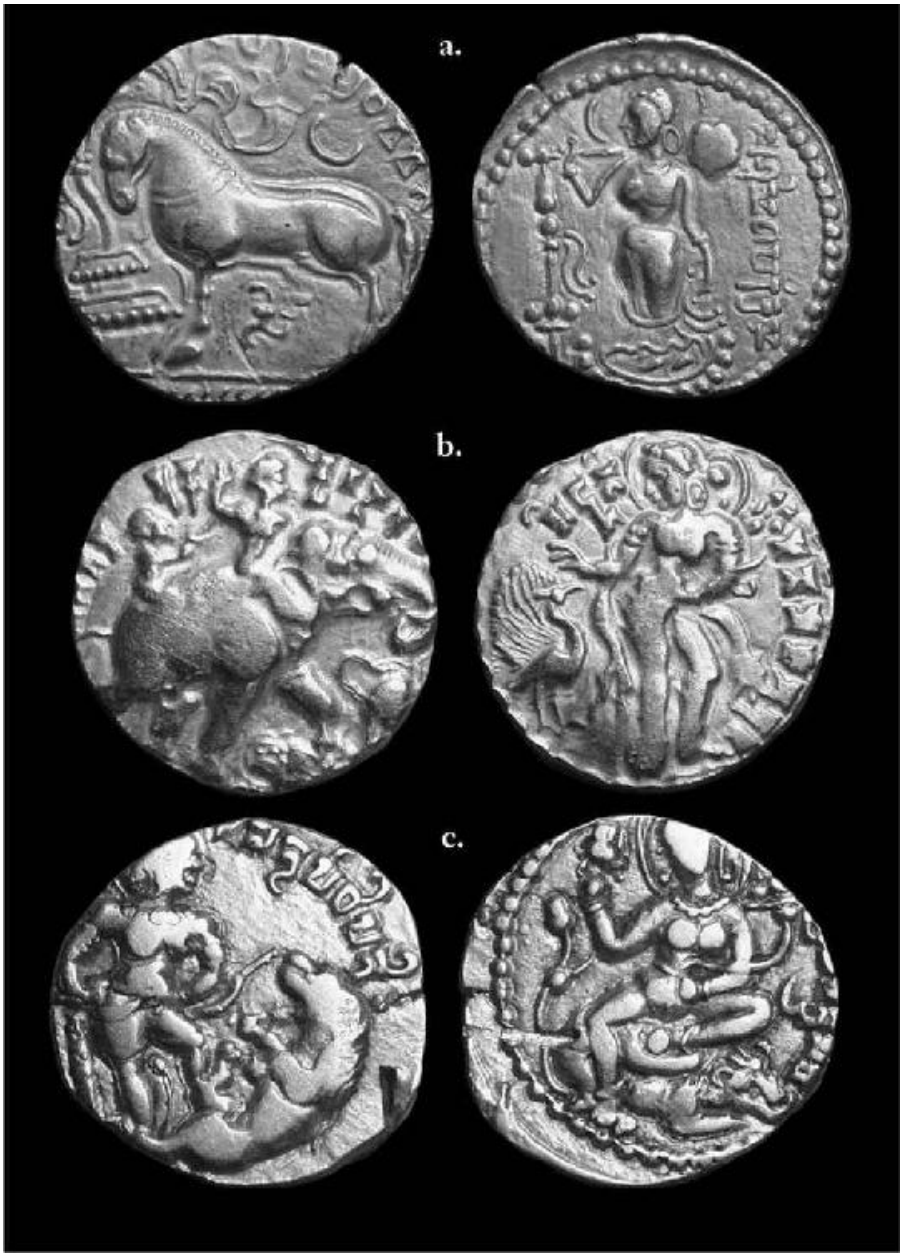
We have also seen that the lion and elephant gained prominence as emblems of kingship and empire in Maurya and post-Maurya numismatic and religious art. Early numismatic representations of the standing lion (and the cheetah) are found on second-century BCE coins of the Indo-Greek king Agathocles and on circa first-century BCE punch-marked coins from Taxila. The lion motif spread swiftly, and we see standing lions on coins of the Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas. The increasing political importance of the lion and the elephant can be linked to the rise and consolidation of early historic kingdoms and empires.[192] However, there was a major difference between the two magnificent animals: The lion did not have any significant utilitarian value, while the elephant was a source of valuable ivory, and even more important, the backbone of ancient Indian armies.

The symbolic importance of the great animals of the forest is reflected in royal rituals. According to Varahamihira, the skin of a bull, lion, and tiger should be placed (in that order) under the king's throne during the ceremonial royal ablution, and there is a detailed discussion of the characteristics of horses and elephants.[193] All this seems in line with the old association of kingship with these animals. But there is a significant change. Varahamihira indicates that the forest is one of the places where the monthly royal ablution should be performed.[194] This change in attitude is reflected in textual descriptions of the royal hunt, and it is most strikingly visible in the manner in which kings and the great animals of the wild are portrayed on coins.

There is a big difference between the representations of animals on early Indian coins and those of the Gupta period. Animal emblems are associated with certain deities on Gupta coins. We see a goddess (Lakshmi?) seated on a lion flanked by elephants and the god Karttikeya with his trademark peacock. More ubiquitous is the *garuḍa,* whose appearance on Gupta coins advertises their kings' faith in the god Vishnu. But most striking of all is the ostentatious display of the king as hunter killing the great mammals of the forest, demonstrating his extraordinary prowess and his mastery over the forest and nature (see Figure 12). While animals such as the tiger and lion are part of

the repertoire of royal symbols from an earlier time, in the Gupta period we get visual representations of their being hunted and killed by kings. Gupta coins flamboyantly advertise the king as hunter and choose to focus on the moment of the kill. So it is not the act of hunting but its imminent outcome, the demonstration of the overwhelming power of the king over the animal, that is highlighted. Routinely described as “animal slayer” types, the details of these coins deserve close attention.

The big carnivores—lions and tigers—are shown on several Gupta coins as being killed single-handedly by the great, powerful king. Samudragupta fells a tiger with an arrow. Chandragupta II effortlessly kills a lion on several coins, in a variety of poses. On one coin, his foot is planted firmly on the lion’s body while he shoots his arrow straight into its mouth. On the reverse is a goddess seated on a lion. The epithet is *Siṁhavikrama* (lion-prowess). We see Kumaragupta I about to slay a tiger with an arrow; the legend on the reverse reads *Vyāghrabalaparākrama* (tiger strength and prowess). Another coin type of Kumaragupta, which shows him killing a lion with an arrow, has the legend *Siṁhamahendra* (lion great king). In all these cases, the king is on foot, and his body is often depicted with pronounced musculature. In contrast, the animal looks effete and helpless as it falls backward.



12 Gupta gold coins: (a) Samudragupta's *aśvamedha* type—horse (obverse), queen (reverse); (b) Kumaragupta I—king on elephant killing a lion (obverse), goddess Lakshmi (reverse); (c) Kumaragupta I—king overpowering lion with the legend *nṛpādhipati* (obverse), goddess Lakshmi or Durga (reverse)

Pankaj Tandon collection; photographs courtesy Pankaj Tandon

There is an interesting variation of this theme on two other coins of Kumaragupta I.[195] Here, the king holds no weapon. He stands

triumphantly, arms akimbo, before the animal, one of his feet planted on its body. The animal reels backward, clearly overpowered by the great king. On the Lucknow Museum coin, the lion has his mouth open in a snarl, while on the other coin, his mouth is closed; Pankaj Tandon suggests that the latter represents a dead trophy. I do not think the idea of displaying the carcass of an animal (a favorite pose of later European hunters) was envisaged by the Gupta coin-designers. The absence of any weapon makes this a more abstract representation, suggesting that the king had overpowered the great animal single-handedly, without the aid of any weapon, through the prowess of his own arms. It is interesting that this coin type has on its reverse the goddess Lakshmi (or Durga) seated daintily on a rather aggressive looking lion.

The king occasionally hunts on a mount. On one coin, Kumaragupta I rides an elephant, holding a goad in his right hand, a parasol-holding attendant seated behind him. The elephant is trampling a lion. The epithet is *Siṁhanihanta Mahendragajaḥ* (literally, "the killer of the lion, the elephant great king"). Elsewhere, we see Kumaragupta I on horseback, holding a sword in his right hand and attacking a rhinoceros, who looks back at him in fear. Unlike in the coins described earlier, here, the king and the animal share space almost equally; in fact, it is the rhinoceros, depicted in a realistic manner with scaly skin, who dominates. The legend reads *Śrī Mahendrakhaḍga* (literally "the illustrious great king rhinoceros"). On the reverse is the goddess Ganga on her crocodile (*makara*) mount. Interestingly, in most of these vigorous hunting scenes, the king is depicted without the halo that is found on other coin types. Another important coin is that of a king named Prakashaditya, which, Tandon has argued, is none other than the Huna king Toramana. The Guptas and Hunas were enemies. What is interesting is that the rather inelegant portrayal of a king on horseback driving his spear through the open mouth of a small lion rearing up, seems to have been inspired by Gupta as well as Sassanian representations.[196]

Do the representations of wild animals signify the king's conquest over the areas that formed their natural habitat? Possibly, but something less specific and more fundamental seems to be expressed. In Sanskrit epic, poetry, and drama, kings are compared with the great animals of the wild, and the hunt is part of the royal routine, sometimes with disastrous (but always momentous) results. The political theorists discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the

royal hunt. Gupta coins take the king–animal analogy forward to a new level. Kings are not equal to the great animals of the wild in their prowess; the fact that they are shown in the act of killing them indicates that their power far exceeds that of these animals, suggesting not analogy but mastery. While the epithets declare that that king has the strength and prowess of a lion / tiger / rhinoceros, the images that show him killing them indicate that his prowess is far greater than that of these animals.

The complex visual and verbal metaphors can be extended even further. The king's killing of men in war could be described in words, but was never portrayed visually. In such a context, showing the king killing the great animals of the wilderness may have symbolized the king's invincibility not only over nature, but also over men. This is confirmed by a coin of Kumaragupta I, which shows the king overpowering a lion; the epithet reads *Nṛpādhipatiḥ* (overlord of kings).[197] We see a blending of metaphors. There is an implicit analogy between the hunt and war; between the king's mastery of the great animals of the forest and his mastery over other kings, all men, all beings.

A Different Kind of Borderland

The forest was not imagined or understood in a single way in ancient India. It was a site for and an object of the exploitation and violence of the state; it was also a source of violent challenge *to* the state. But it was much more. The Harappans accorded an important place to large mammals in their religious and political symbolism. Some of these animals retained an importance in the visual representations of political power in the historic period. Ashoka's reign marks an important watershed when certain animals—the lion, elephant, and bull—became imperial symbols and shared space with the powerful words of the king, emphasizing not military victories but virtue.

In the course of subsequent centuries, Indian political discourse become increasingly anthropocentric, but once again, not all sources tell the same story. The economic and military resources offered by the forest and its persistent association with renunciation and release from the cycle of rebirth in ancient Indian thought were important factors in mitigating its negative representation. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* contain different ideas about the forest, the latter having an overall much more positive imaging of the forest and its inhabitants. Political treatises such as the *Arthashastra* and *Nitisara* recognize the forest as an important economic and military resource to be exploited by the state. The great animals—especially the elephant, lion, tiger, and bull—are important parts of the imagery and allegory of kingship in Sanskrit poetry and drama. The forest and its great animals have an importance in didactic story literature such as the *Jataka* and the *Panchatantra,* where they are given important roles in the generation of very different kinds of ethical ideas and political ideas, especially in relation to violence and nonviolence. In all cases, there is a constant engagement with the forest and its inhabitants, both humans and animals—an engagement marked by a recognition of conflict and difference and as well as interdependence and incorporation. All the views of the forest that have been discussed here are perspectives from the city, the capital, or from the dominant religious and cultural traditions. The perspectives of the forest dwellers toward the state are recorded nowhere.

Ancient Indian political history must have included innumerable conflicts with tribal communities of the forest belts, which rarely find

mention in royal inscriptions. The stern warning administered by the otherwise pacific king Ashoka to the forest tribes suggests such conflicts. The *praśastis* of later kings usually advertise military victories achieved against other states. The boast in the Allahabad *praśasti* that Samudragupta had made all the forest people his servants is an exception, but again, the tribal adversaries are not specifically named. Animal imagery known to *kāvya* appears in epigraphic descriptions of great kings, but the forest people are largely ignored. Nevertheless, we should not be misled by the veil of silence that almost completely conceals the essential and continuous violence of the encounter between the state and the forest.

By and large, the ancient Indian tradition considers the hunt an admirable royal practice and an important part of the ideology of kingship. Its benefits are routinely listed, although there is a recognition of its risks and of the fact that an admirable royal sport can become a vice. Stronger discordant notes of anxiety are struck by Ashoka, the Jatakas, Kamandaka, and Kalidasa. Ashoka's abhorrence of hunting applies not only to the royal hunt but also to hunting as a subsistence activity, and he seems to have made strenuous, and no doubt ineffectual, efforts to put an end to it. His condemnation of hunting was part of a larger code of nonviolent ethics, and his prohibitions were accompanied by paternalistic care toward animals, both wild and domesticated. Kamandaka has reservations about the royal hunt on moral grounds, and Kalidasa gives a derisive declamation on hunting in the *Abhijnanashakuntala.* At the same time, the king as hunter appears prominently on Gupta coinage, as the vanquisher of the powerful animals of the wild—a metaphor for his irresistible power over the animals of the forest, all his adversaries, all men.

Over the twelve hundred years between circa 600 BCE and 600 CE, there was a steady increase in what *we* would consider two kinds of political violence, one involving the killing of men (war), the other involving the killing of animals (the royal hunt). Both had acquired an important place in the ideology of kingship by the middle of the first millennium. With a few exceptions, both were presented as aspects of kingship that were to be celebrated, not as violent activities that were a source of shame or sorrow. Military conflicts between state armies and recalcitrant tribals were acceptable even to that prophet of nonviolence, Ashoka. The exploitation of the resources of the forest and the insertion of oases of Brahmanical culture in the form of

āśramas and *agrahāras* involved conflicts with forest dwellers and a fracturing of their livelihoods, habitats, and culture. Political ideology offered a variety of templates within which the forest and its inhabitants could not only be subordinated and eliminated, but also incorporated and assimilated. But even the processes of incorporation and assimilation must have, at least initially, involved much conflict and violence.

For ancient times, there is no data on how many tribals (or royal soldiers, for that matter) were killed or made to kneel before kings; how many were transformed into peasants, "Hinduized," and absorbed into the caste fold; how many made the transition from chieftains to kings; and how many resisted, held on to their hunting-gathering ways, and retained their distinct social and political identities and traditions. These histories have to be extracted with great effort by piecing together scattered clues, give us only fleeting glimpses of violent political encounters. But the fact that insurgencies with strongholds in the forested tribal belts pose a challenge to the Indian state even today shows that the age-old violent political conflict between the state and the forest continues, although in different form. The precarious existence of the great mammals of the forest shows that although there were changes in the technology and culture of the elite hunt, the onslaught against these animals continued with even greater intensity and ferocity in medieval, colonial, and independent India. Now, as then, the forest remains a borderland with a difference. It does not lie on the margins of the state. It lies within it.

Conclusion

VIOLENCE IS INHERENT in the state. A major function of political ideology is to legitimize state violence in its general as well as specific forms and to present it as necessary, justified force. But what is considered legitimate force by the state may be considered unjustified violence by those against whom it is targeted. In ancient India, the perspectives of rebels or victims of state violence rarely appear in the historical record, so there are no counternarratives. However, the distinction between necessary force and violence is not entirely dependent on whose point of view we are considering. Even state perspectives recognized the need to define this boundary and the difficulties in doing so.

The fact that the problem of violence, including political violence, is debated in so many ancient texts is a firm counter to the claim that India did not have a tradition of moral philosophy. The proclivity for philosophizing about politico-moral matters is most vividly on display in the *Mahabharata,* but it is also present elsewhere. The discourse is frequently embedded in metaphysics, especially in ideas of merit and demerit, sin and evil, karma, and rebirth. A metaphysical grounding is not unique to Indian political thought—for instance, politics, ethics, and metaphysics are linked in Plato's thought. The fact that the Indian tradition recognizes both an absolute morality as well as a contextual, instrumentalist one is not unique either. Plato regarded moral principles as objective and unchanging, while Aristotle recognized that ethical mores had to be contextualized. Perhaps what is unique is that the Indian tradition simultaneously accepts both kinds of morality and discusses the tension and conflict between them. Even more unique is the intensity and longevity of the discussion of violence and nonviolence, both at the individual and the political level, which is not found anywhere else in the world.

I have identified three overlapping phases of early Indian kingship —foundation (circa 600 BCE–200 BCE), transition (circa 200 BCE–300 CE), and maturity (circa 300–600 CE). All three phases generated powerful and highly influential political ideas, which became important parts of the technology of political violence. From the time of the emergence of early historic states, there was an increasing recognition that kings were not ordinary men and that because of their duties, could not be expected to follow the usual ethical norms. The king was viewed as having a special relationship with force and violence, as a preeminent controller, manager, and, when necessary, perpetrator. We have seen the connection between the growth and systemization of state violence and increasingly sophisticated attempts to mask, invisibilize, justify, and aestheticize it in various ways. While the political ideas can be anchored in their historical contexts, a variety of views, grounded in different genre-related, disciplinary, ideological, religious, philosophical, and authorial perspectives, existed at any given point of time. Sometimes, ideas anticipated events. For instance, the idea of empire in early Vedic texts was expressed well before large, powerful empires appeared on the scene. Even more striking is the fact that Kautilya's idea of the omniscient, omnipotent state in the *Arthashastra* was way ahead of his age; such a state did not exist in historical time but in the author's political imagination.

The king was especially associated with punishment, which was understood as retribution for transgressions and crimes. The king's just punishment, including capital punishment, was considered necessary for governance, the maintenance of order, and the prevention of chaos. However, the dangers of excessive harshness or unfairness in punishment were also recognized. Unlike in ancient Greek thought, we do not encounter the idea of the reformative potential of punishment. However, the references to the periodic ceremonial release of prisoners suggest that the king had powers of forgiveness and absolution. A measured approach was also advocated in relation to taxation. The contractual idea of the king's right to a share of the people's produce as wages for the protection he offers them is accompanied by warnings against excessively harsh exactions.

The transformation of the brutality and violence of war into something else, its justification, and its celebration were important aspects of political ideology. The *Mahabharata* expresses a range of reactions to war, from strident justification to lament. But except for

Ashoka, war was considered a natural part of politics. The Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions do not proscribe warfare. The theoretical perspective is matched by political practice. Kharavela, the model Jaina king, did not eschew war. Ashoka, the model Buddhist king, propagated nonviolence and gave up war, but his warning to the forest people indicates that even he recognized that absolute pacifism was not possible in the political sphere. Kautilya and Kamandaka adopt a largely pragmatic approach, urging caution and calculation, although the latter had pragmatic as well as ethical sensitivities against war.

The interface between the state and the wilderness, which must have been marked by a great deal of violence, produced a profusion of vivid images and reactions. The forest is many things in different texts, but four aspects are highlighted in the political response, and actual or potential violence are implied in all four. The first is the forest as a rich economic and military resource, discussed in great detail in the *Arthashastra.* The second is the forest as a place of exile for political rivals, reflected in the epics. The third is the forest as a site of the royal hunt, an activity considered both emblematic as well as problematic, which features in the epics, political treatises, and *kāvya.* The fourth, and most problematic aspect, is the forest as the abode of people who posed a violent political threat to the state, an idea reflected in the political treatises, but ironically, best exemplified in Ashoka's stern threat to the forest people in his anti-war thirteenth rock edict. The violence of the centuries-long encounters between states and forest dwellers was subsumed within complex representations that also contain certain positive elements, especially those associated with the forest *āśrama*s of the *ṛṣi*s.

There is no single "Indian" theory of kingship or of political violence. There are several ideas that emerged from an intense dialogue across intellectual and religious traditions and as responses to the realities and challenges of political praxis, framed within the demands and conventions of different genres. There was a dharma and an *artha* view of kingship. But these generated a variety of models, including hybrid ones, all of which ultimately upheld the need for the king to use necessary force to maintain and strengthen his position. While Rama of the *Ramayana* represents a dharmic king associated with filial piety, compassion, and an aura of perfection, Yudhishthira of the *Mahabharata* is a tormented figure, drawn towards renunciation and not really an impressive role model at all. Kautilya's king is a

ruthless power-seeker who places political and material gain above all else. Kamandaka, also a representative of the *artha* view, is more sensitive to the ethics of nonviolence.

The dharma view of kingship placed strong emphasis on the king's duties. These include upholding a social order in which everyone knew their place and followed their prescribed duties—the dharma of the *varṇas* and *āśramas* in the Brahmanical tradition. The Buddhist and Jaina traditions also had the idea of a hierarchical normative social order, although the Brahmana did not stand at its apex, and the highest values were represented by the renunciatory sphere, where the usual social distinctions became irrelevant, at least theoretically. The king's duties were not confined to the maintenance and perpetuation of a social hierarchy. They included delivering justice, protecting the people, and preventing the onset of *mātsya-nyāya*—the social chaos arising from the strong preying on the weak. In the ideal state, where kings upheld the social order, meted out justice, and protected their people, especially the weak, all force used by the king in order to discharge these duties was necessary force; it was justified and legitimate. But it could be argued that this was not the case if the king failed to discharge one, some, or all of these duties. We have seen in Chapter 1 that the *Mahabharata* states that a cruel king who does not protect his people and robs them in the name of taxation should be killed by them as though he were a mad dog.[1] Such statements can be read as a warning to kings rather than as an exhortation to regicide, but a window for questioning the king's potential violence was implicit in the dharma view of kingship. The *artha* view of kingship also invoked the above-mentioned duties of the king, although its main focus was on the king's augmentation of his power and his subjects' prosperity. The carefully calculated force required to attain these ends was considered justified and legitimate; anything beyond this was excess and could be counterproductive. So both the dharma and *artha* views of kingship distinguished between necessary, legitimate force and unnecessary, illegitimate political violence, recognizing the problem of tyranny and oppression. The king's use of necessary force was ultimately upheld, but the elements of doubt and critique were never completely obliterated.

The ancient Indian understanding of tyranny recognized the importance of innate personality traits. Bad rulers are immoral, unjust, cruel, and violent; they lack discernment, balance, and self-control. And yet the correlations are not entirely straightforward. Good kings

can have imperfections. We have seen that Ashoka of the *Ashokavadana* retains some of his cruelty and wrath. Rama sometimes gets angry and occasionally seems to cross the line of moral propriety. In the *Raghuvamsha,* under the thick veneer of perfection, we see weakness and vice in the character of certain Ikshvaku kings. On the other hand, evil men do not always make bad kings. Duryodhana of the *Mahabharata* and Ravana of the *Ramayana* are villainous characters, prone to anger, cruelty, and arrogance, but they are not really described as ruling badly.

By the middle of the first millennium, political perspectives acquired greater sophistication and ideological cohesiveness in the formulation of ideas and ideals of political paramountcy, harmonizing the conflicting and violent aspects of kingship. This is most strongly visible in *kāyvas* (such as the *Raghuvamsha*), on coinage, and in epigraphic panegyric, which express the dominant model of classical Indian kingship. But the *Arthashastra* perspective lived on in the *Mudrarakshasa* and *Panchantantra,* where kingship and political power are shorn of their dharmic trappings. Kingship was never completely captured by dharma.

The debates revealed in texts and inscriptions are largely debates among men, and for men. Glimmers of women's perspectives are rare and, where visible, are mostly expressed in the form of lament. Although the king's prowess and power were usually associated with his masculinity, the portrayals of Draupadi, Shikhandi, and Arjuna as Brihannada in the *Mahabharata* indicate that aggression was not considered an exclusively male preserve. This is even more evident in the religious sphere, in the exploits and iconography of the goddess Durga, who, in her popular Mahishasuramardini form, plunges her weapon into the body of the buffalo demon Mahisha, signifying the triumph of good over evil.[2]

One of the enduring features of ancient Indian political thought is the idea of a strong relationship between the inner mental and emotional state of the king and the health of the state. (This idea is present in ancient Greece as well, from the epic poets through to Plato.) The desirability of self-control and detachment was a widespread idea in Samkhya*,* Yoga*,* Upanishadic, Buddhist, and Jaina thought and percolated into the political domain in various ways. Renunciation cast its powerful shadow over the dharma view of kingship. The Buddhist and Jaina traditions emphasized the control of the senses, separated the king from the renunciant, and asserted the

latter's supremacy. Kalidasa echoed the idea of the *āśrama* scheme and favored the ideal of the sage-like king (*rajarṣi*). The contradiction inherent in his model of renunciatory kingship is that of a king who aspires to become a world victor but is unmoved by the desire for power. But the renunciation juggernaut came to an abrupt halt when it reached the political theorists, who, while advocating discipline and self-control, did not recommend the king giving up power at any stage in his career.

As important as the philosophical underpinnings of the emphasis on royal self-control is the politico-historical context. In a polity devoid of institutional checks, and knowing the royal predilection for wanton violence and debauchery, the political theorists must have been concerned not only with how the king's power could be increased, but also with how it could be controlled. To the arsenal of arguments based on duty, merit, heaven, and hell, they added careful deliberation, caution, the power of counsel, discipline, and self-control. Kautilya, Kamandaka, and even Kalidasa, must have realized that the only real control on the perennial danger of the king abusing his power and unleashing brute violence was the one that he had to be persuaded to exercise over himself.

It is difficult to estimate the impact of the discourse of violence and nonviolence—so prominent in a section of the religious sphere—on political practice. Kings and states were not the only managers of conflict and violence in ancient India. They shared this responsibility with religious specialists (for instance, Brahmanas and monks) and corporate groups (such as village assemblies and caste groups). Given our sources' great proclivity for and success in concealing conflict, it is not clear to what extent these agents were successful in containing and controlling violence. But there is no reason to believe that social and political life in ancient India was marked by significantly lower levels of violence than that of other cultures.

Perhaps the reason why the fairly pervasive discourse on nonviolence does not appear to have had a major impact in the political sphere lies in the ambivalent attitude of the dominant intellectual and religious traditions. As we have seen, even religions that emphasized the ethics of nonviolence tacitly admitted that some amount of violence was necessary in the political sphere. The discourse on dharma, which could have provided a clear answer to the problem of political violence, refused do so. It became part of the problem, a buffer between theory and practice, between the

desirability of nonviolence and its sheer impossibility in the political sphere, justifying and integrating it into the social and political fabric.

Ancient Indian ideas about the state, empire, sovereignty, war, victory, punishment, force, and violence are, in several respects, different from their later European counterparts. However, some of the differences that have been suggested need to be countered. It is not correct, for instance, to assert that "Hindu culture" (whatever that might mean) did not recognize a distinction between external and internal, or public and private, violence. The word *yuddha* is used in ancient texts for both one-to-one combat and wars, and the word *daṇḍa* for both force and punishment. But the use of the same word does not indicate a lack of differentiation at the level of conceptualization, which emerges very clearly from the context of usage.

Religion, Dharma, and Violence

Viewing the relationship between the political and religious domains in ancient India using the western framework of state and church does not work. The Brahmanas, who wielded authority in royal courts, did not form an organized institution. The sangha—Buddhist or Jaina—was never an important power-broker. Even during Ashoka's reign, the king wielded authority over the Buddhist monastic order. Unlike in some other Asian countries, in India, Buddhism never succeeded in monopolizing the state.

We have seen that the responses to political violence defy rigid religious categorization. This is partly because religious boundaries were permeable to some extent, as can be seen in overlaps in metaphysics and ethics across different philosophical and religious traditions. But more important than this was the religious ideologues' keen awareness of the realities of the exercise of power. Although extremely sensitive to violence in other contexts, Buddhist and Jaina texts do not unequivocally reject the king's use of force or war. They recognize that for the king, the practice of absolute nonviolence is impossible.

This does not mean that religion was totally unconnected with violence in ancient India. We have seen that victories in war were often occasions for kings to make generous gifts of land to Brahmanas or monasteries. Kharavela's Hathigumpha inscription refers to a prestigious religious icon as an important element in the war between the Nandas and Chedis. The popularity of deities such as Indra, Karttikeya, and Durga no doubt had a great deal to do with the fact that they were associated with war and victory. Violence was a part of the world of the gods, and, as we see in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana,* the wars between the gods and demons occasionally spilled dramatically into the human realm.

The religious texts and political narratives of early historic north India convey a distinct competition and one-upmanship between Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Ashoka's schism edict suggests dissension and acrimony within the Buddhist sangha. The twelfth major rock edict, where he makes a passionate plea for religious concord, suggests a larger context of religious discord. But did the debate, competition, dissension, and acrimony ever translate into

actual violence? Three kings—Pushyamitra, Mihirakula, and Shashanka—are singled out by the Buddhist tradition for violent religious persecution. And yet, such accounts form the exception rather than the rule. Kings generally bestowed their patronage on a variety of beneficiaries, regardless of their personal religious affiliations. I have referred to this as an "inclusive sectarianism." This pluralistic religious policy was, no doubt, motivated by political interest, but it also mirrored a highly variegated religious landscape. It is this policy that probably accounts for the lack of large-scale religious conflict and violence during the period we have surveyed. This has important lessons for the present and the future.

It is not sectarian "religion" but the more abstract idea of dharma that was central to ancient Indian political discourse. Not one, but many dharmas / dhammas were in circulation. In the Brahmanical tradition, dharma has multiple roots; it is one and many, unitary and contextual, eternal and changing. In spite of the scaffolding of *varṇa* and *āśrama,* in many situations, dharma remains unfathomable. As the *Mahabharata* never tires of telling us, dharma is subtle, inscrutable.[3] On the other hand, in the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, dhamma is theoretically fixed and all-encompassing, and its authority is less open to doubt and questioning. These differences in the nature of dharma were accompanied by different perspectives on the relationship between kingship, dharma, and renunciation. Right from the outset, Jainism and Buddhism clearly and unambiguously enunciated the superiority of the Jina or Buddha over the king. In Brahmanism and Hinduism, on the other hand, the relationship between the king and Brahmana was more complex and remained ambiguous and unresolved. While there are many assertions of the supremacy of dharma in the Brahmanical texts, this supremacy is often fractured, mainly because of the conspicuous absence of a central religious institution, text, or dogma.

We have already seen how, at a general level, ancient Indian thought displays an awareness of, and an unease with, the violence inherent in the exercise of political power. Interestingly, perhaps because of the great importance of nonviolence in Buddhism and Jainism, they tended, at least in the initial stages, not to dwell on confronting political violence. The problem is discussed most intensely in texts belonging to the Brahmanical tradition, especially in the *Mahabharata.* And yet, notwithstanding the discourse on nonviolence, whether as part of the Buddhist or Jaina ethical code or the

Brahmanical idea of *sāmānya dharma,* the response toward political violence, to a significant extent, cut across religious traditions, both at the level of theory as well as practice. This is especially clear in the discussion of war.

There is no coherent Hindu theory of warfare, just as there are no coherent Buddhist or Jaina ones, and there are several nonreligious perspectives as well. The ideas of *dharma-yuddha* or *dharma-vijaya* in the *Mahabharata, Bhagavadgita, Arthashastra,* and *Raghuvamsha* refer to righteous war and victory, considered righteous for a variety of reasons that we have explored. This should be distinguished from what we might consider "religious war," of which there are other examples. The Mahayana *Mahaparinirvanasutra* states that those who do not follow the doctrine and follow unwholesome ones can be killed without compunction. Killing such people is similar to killing trees, mowing grass, or dissecting a dead body. Vajrayana texts also echo such ideas.[4] The close relationship between king, sangha, and violence is evident in the early history of Sri Lanka, where the violent conflict between the Mahavihara and Abhayagiri monasteries in the third century was backed by king Mahasena. The fifth century *Mahavamsa* presents the Sri Lankan king Dutthagamani's war against the Tamil king Elara as a religious war aimed at bringing glory to the Buddha's doctrine. Dutthagamani is described as having marched toward Anuradhapura with a relic in his spear, accompanied by a powerful army and five hundred monks. A group of *arhat*s assured him that he had committed no wrong in waging this war, because killing evil unbelievers was morally no worse than killing animals.

Later Buddhist traditions justified the violence of war with greater vigor.[5] In the early twentieth century, Zen Buddhism provided an ideology for Japanese military expansion, arguing that taking another's life is an attempt to bring to life the latter's Buddha nature. When one attains a state in which every precept is observed swiftly and completely, questions of existence and nonexistence, life and death, killing and not killing, become inconsequential.[6] Further, although suicide is disapproved of in early Buddhism, there is a strong tradition of monks killing themselves for political causes. Examples include the protests of Vietnamese monks against American military intervention between the 1950s and 1970s, and the continuing self-immolations of Tibetan monks to protest against Chinese control of their homeland.

Interestingly, among the many violent episodes in Asian history

where Buddhism has directly justified either state violence or the violence of rebels, none come from India. The nature of the relationship between the state, society, and sangha seems to be the reason. In India, Buddhism did not manage to capture the Indian state (not even under Ashoka) or ever pose a strong challenge to it. Nor did it become the ideology of an overt social protest movement of marginalized groups until the mid-twentieth century, under Ambedkar. The relative insulation from active involvement in the spheres of political power and social conflict in ancient India was probably responsible for Buddhism's eventual decline and marginalization in the subcontinent.

The Circulation and Afterlife of Political Ideas

Many of the texts discussed in this book circulated widely and had great long-term impact on political ideas, including ideas of political violence, within India. The many commentaries on the *Manusmriti, Raghuvamsha, Arthashastra,* and *Nitisara* indicate their importance in intellectual life. The many versions of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* reflect their continued and continuing cultural impact. Similar ideas, sometimes expressed in almost the same words, in the epics, religious texts, works on dharma and politics, poetry, drama, and inscriptions indicate the conversations between different notions of the political, and it is often difficult to distinguish just who was borrowing from whom.

The circulation of epigraphic discourse is evident from the fact that royal donative inscriptions from different parts of the subcontinent show striking similarity in policy and ideas. On the other hand, there are also significant changes across the centuries. The Girnar rock, which has inscriptions of Ashoka, Rudradaman, and Skandagupta, and the Allahabad pillar, which bears inscriptions of Ashoka, Samudragupta, and Jahangir, represent palimpsests of political ideas of different ages inscribed on stone. The reuse of ancient pillars in medieval times is itself interesting. It has been argued that such pillars were part of a larger circulation of material objects, which played an important role in the emergence of transcultural identities in medieval India.[7]

The epics, with violent wars forming the core of the stories, have constituted powerful, dynamic resources for ancient Indian political discourse from very early times right down to the present.[8] The great importance of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in Indian, indeed Asian, history, lies far beyond exaggerated claims for their antiquity or confident assertions of their historicity. Whether or not the epic events actually happened is least important. Much more important is the enormous cultural influence they have wielded over centuries, through the great diversity of what A. K. Ramanujan has urged us to call their various "tellings,"[9] which exist in an exciting array of written, oral, artistic, and performative forms, including highly popular television series. Apart from the Valmiki *Ramayana,* the many other influential tellings of the Rama story include Kamban's twelfth-

century *Iramavataram* in Tamil and Tulsidas's sixteenth-century *Ramcharitmanas* in Awadhi, to name only a few. A violent war is central to most tellings of the epic, but there is a significant modification in Jaina renderings.[10] In the Jaina *Paumachariu,* Ravana is a tragic hero who is killed by Lakshmana, not by Rama, who embodies all the Jaina virtues, including nonviolence.

The various tellings of the *Mahabharata* are just as interesting. For instance, Jaina tellings center on the twenty-second *tirthaṅkara* Arishtanemi, and the Pandavas and Yadavas (the confederacy to which Krishna's Vrishnis belonged) are his followers. There is a great war, but it is between Jarasandha (the king of Magadha) and the Yadavas, with the Pandavas fighting on the latter's side, and the overall emphasis is not on martial valor but on renunciation and Jaina virtues. The influence of the epics continued well beyond ancient times. It has been suggested that the *Razmnamah*—a Persian transcreation of the *Mahabharata* commissioned by the seventeenth-century Mughal emperor Akbar—was an important Mughal courtly text and occupied a central place in the crafting of a new Indo-Persian imperial aesthetic.[11] Rama's story continued to be invoked in modern India, in Gandhi's idea of the ideal state of Ramarajya.[12] In more recent times, it became part of the Hindutva agenda of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the communal polarization over building a Rama temple at Ayodhya, and the violent destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992.

Violence and nonviolence were central to the various interpretations of the *Bhagavadgita,* a text that figures prominently in modern Indian political discourse.[13] Gandhi read the *Bhagavadgita* as a text that valorized nonviolence. But his was one of many different interpretations, and the work could just as easily be used to argue that violence ostensibly performed in the line of duty harms neither the killer nor the killed. J. Robert Oppenheimer later stated that it was a line from the *Bhagavadgita* that went through his mind as he watched the blinding mushroom cloud rising from the first atomic explosion in the New Mexico desert on July 16, 1945.[14]

Other texts that have much to say about political violence and have been discussed in this book also had a long afterlife. Bhasa's renown was recognized by other ancient poets and dramatists, and his plays are performed even today in the Kutiyattam temple theater tradition of Kerala. Kautilya's *Arthashastra,* when rediscovered in 1905, led to a radical reassessment of ancient Indian political thought. In early twentieth century Bengal, Kautilya alias Chanakya was reimagined as

the figure of the quintessential political man of India in scholarly discourse, novels, and theater.[15]

Didactic story literature rich in political content traveled widely. Sculptural representations of Jataka stories occur at Buddhist stupa sites across India. Later textual renderings of the stories are found in the *Jatakamala, Mahavastu,* and *Avadana Kalpalata.* The *Panchatantra* had a long and influential legacy, too.[16] The *Hitopadesha* (ninth / tenth century) shares its frame story and main narrator, and retellings of *Panchatantra* tales found their way into later anthologies such as the *Brihakathamanjari* and *Kathasaritsagara.* Sculptural representations of *Panchatantra* tales are found in India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.[17] That this text continues to inspire art even today is evident in A. Ramachandran's paintings in the "Fables without Morals" series.[18] The continued circulation, interpretation, and reinterpretation of such seminal texts kept their political ideas and debates, including those related to political violence, alive.

The Wider Travels of Indic Political Ideas

The texts that had a long-term impact on political ideas within India are precisely the ones which traveled far beyond. A great deal is known about the flows of commodities across Europe, Asia, and Africa in premodern times; much less is known about the transmission and circulation of ideas. Sheldon Pollock has drawn attention to the extraordinary travels of the Sanskrit language and Sanskrit texts within and beyond the subcontinent and the creation of a Sanskrit cosmopolis.[19] O. W. Wolters has suggested that the universality and flexibility of the Indian *śāstric* tradition made it very amenable to appropriation in geographically and culturally distant and different contexts.[20] However, much remains to be understood about the agents and details of cultural interactions across Asia in premodern times.[21] Looking at the history of political ideas within a global perspective requires breaking out of old ways of thinking in terms of dichotomies between foreign influence and indigeneity, and recognizing that the travels of ideas were part of multiple, intersecting, and interacting cultural spheres, and that they often resulted in surprising metamorphoses.

Indic political ideas traveled to distant lands through treatises on dharma and politics. Southeast Asian legal traditions show the influence of Dharmashastra and the *Arthashastra,* along with Islamic Sharia and Chinese legal thought, remodeled to suit their Southeast Asian locales.[22] The Burmese legal texts known as the *Dhammathat*s, which concentrate on civil and criminal law, draw on Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions, but their content is quite unique.[23] They describe Manu as a minister of the legendary first king, Mahasammata. In their description of the institution of kingship, the *Dhammathat*s concentrate on the king's right to impose taxes and administer punishment, dealing in detail with the latter. The *Manusmriti* influenced the Javanese–Balinese law code known as the *Kutaramanawa,* and the Kamandaka tradition had long-term impact in Bali.[24]

Some of the most influential Indian texts were those in which political and moral precepts were entwined with an engaging narrative frame. The long-standing and intense cultural interactions between India and Southeast Asia are best represented in the travels

and transformations of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana.* The life of the epics in Southeast Asia displays enormous variety and extreme cultural adaptability, and there is considerable remolding of the details of the political violence that lies at their center. For instance, the Malay *Ramayana,* known as the *Hikayat Seri Rama,* was influenced by Arabic and Persian literary forms, and has survived in manuscripts that reveal several variations and a new Islamic molding of the epic story. A young Rawana (Ravana) is sent off to Bukit Serendib (Sri Lanka) as punishment on account of his bad behavior, and Nabi (Adam) successfully pleads with Allah on his behalf to grant him four kingdoms, on condition that he behave properly and rule justly.[25] The most magnificent artistic examples of the Southeast Asian interpretations of the Indian epics are the sculptural reliefs in the Vishnu temple at Angkor in Cambodia, where the epic stories are combined with Khmer ideas and expressed in a distinct and brilliantly executed artistic style.

The political ideas of the Buddhist *Jataka* also traveled widely. The Southeast Asian textual versions include collections known as the *Pannasa-Jataka* (Fifty Jatakas) in Pali and various Southeast Asian vernaculars.[26] Artistic representations of Jataka stories are found in Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia including at Borobudur in Java and the Chula Pathon Chedi and Wat Si Chum in Thailand.[27] In Myanmar, Jatakas are represented in paintings in the Wetkyi temple and painted mud reliefs at the Ashe and Anauk stupas in Bagan; and in painted stone reliefs in the Shitthaung temple at Mrauk U. Visual renderings of Jataka stories are found in Central Asia and China, for instance, in the Kizil caves in eastern Turkestan and the Mogao grottos in Dunhuang, and the stories are often depicted on Tibetan thankas.[28] The Jatakas appear in Sri Lanka as well, for instance, in Lenavihara, a Kandy-period cave shrine at Yapahuwa. Even today, the Jataka stories (often drastically reworked) are popular in Sri Lanka and parts of Southeast Asia in the form of published texts, comic books, art, plays, and films.

While the Jatakas, along with their message of political piety and compassion, traveled extensively southward and eastward, the *Panchatantra,* addressing perennial political and personal concerns, including those related to violence, from a pragmatic perspective stamped with wit and humor, winged its way westward. The sixth-century polymath Said al-Andalusi singles out the Pahlavi *Kalilah wa Dimnah* (the first translation of the *Panchatantra*) as a work on “the

improvement of morals and the amelioration of upbringing."[29] The eleventh-century Arab scholar Al-Biruni writes that the *Panchatantra* had spread far in Persian, Hindi, and Arabic versions, which did not always adhere to the Sanskrit original.[30] The text reached Europe by the eleventh century, and by the sixteenth century, there were versions in English, Greek, Latin, German, Italian, Spanish, Czech, and old Slavonic.[31] Johannes Hertel counted over two hundred versions in over fifty languages. The *Panchatantra* seems to have influenced the *Arabian Nights,* the fables of La Fontaine, and Sufi mystic literature.

An awareness of Indian political ideas and poetry is visible in many Southeast Asian inscriptions and texts, which share similar concerns with justifying, legitimizing, and aestheticizing political power and the violence inherent in it. The Sanskrit poetry in Cambodian inscriptions is comparable in ideas, content, and sophistication with Indian epigraphic panegyric. Angkor inscriptions refer to the great Indian poets such as Kalidasa, Bharavi, and Banabhatta. The tenth-century Pre Rup inscription contains allusions to the events, characters, and ideas of the *Raghuvamsha.* A thirteenth-century text called the *Sumanasantaka* is a Javanese rendering of Kalidasa's story of prince Aja and princess Indumati.[32]

Indic political ideas also flowed across land and ocean via free-floating gnomic or didactic verses, maxims, and proverbs, which existed in oral and written forms, individually as well as in anthologies.[33] Drawn from the *Panchatantra, Hitopadesha,* Bhartrihari's poems and verses attributed to Chanakya, the influence of these verses spread to Tibet, central Asia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Java, and Bali.[34] These verses largely disseminated the *artha* view of politics, with its pragmatic approach to political power and violence.

Indian inscriptions influenced royal epigraphic practice and expression in various parts of Southeast Asia; we see a similar attempt to balance the martial aspect of kingship with other elements and to justify and celebrate the king's force. The Sanskrit language, Indic scripts, and Indic political vocabulary expressing the ideas of king as punisher, warrior, and maintainer of order appear along with Cham elements in Champa (central and southern Vietnam). A seventh-century inscription from Trà-kiêu refers to king Prakashadharma who broke through his enemies fearlessly, unaided by the powers of punishment (*daṇḍa*) or creating dissension (*bheda*). An eleventh-century inscription from My-so'n tells of the compassionate, generous, and intelligent king Jaya Indravarmadeva, who pursued the three

goals (*trivarga*) and followed the four expedients and sixfold royal policy.[35]

The impact of Indian Sanskrit texts and epigraphic practice are visible in Old Khmer and Old Javanese inscriptions.[36] The latter contain references to Manu, the four *varṇas* and *āśramas*, and the characters of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Emphasis on the king's military prowess is combined with Buddhist and Hindu religious ideas. For instance, an eighth-century Sanskrit inscription from Kelurak speaks of the philanthropy and compassion of king Indra Sanggramadhananjaya as well as his having destroyed his powerful enemies and conquered all the circles of kings through his prowess. Another inscription of the same period from Canggal refers to the great island of Yava (Java), ruled by king Sanjaya. Sanjaya's father, Sanna, is said to have used conciliation and gifts, ruled properly over his subjects like a father, and justly protected the earth for a very long time like Manu. Sanjaya himself is described as learned in the *śāstras*, excelling others in bravery and other virtues, and as having overthrown many a circle of kings like Raghu.[37] Occasionally, Javanese inscriptions reveal a connection between land grants and war. An early tenth-century grant from Kubukubu seems to have been made to certain individuals as reward for their services in a successful attack on Bali.[38] Some of the Javanese grants contain a list of exemptions, but the nature of these exemptions is quite different from those found in India. All this shows that while the *idea* of the land grant document with tax exemptions and privileges as a part of royal policy seems to have come to Java from India, the details and even the nomenclature of the document (*sīma*) are very Javanese.

Similarly, while the idea of the threatening imprecation as part of a royal grant seems to have derived from Indian practice, the imprecations in Southeast Asian inscriptions are quite different from their Indian counterparts. The Malay inscriptions of the kingdom of Srivijaya (in south Sumatra) bristle with allusions to conflict and war. The twenty-eight lines of the circa seventh-century Telaga Batu inscription are inscribed on a stone hooded by a carving of seven cobra heads.[39] The inscription consists of a series of violent curses directed against a long list of people who were evidently seen as potential threats to the king. They are all warned that if they plot against the king, they will be killed by the curse. The stone has a groove and spout under the writing; water was probably poured over it in order to absorb the curses, and the potential rebels mentioned in

the inscription were perhaps made to drink it. Although the inscription contains several Sanskrit terms, the raw expression and apprehension of political violence and the magical remedy against it are not encountered anywhere in India.

Apart from political ideas, military ideas and practices traveled, too. Thomas R. Trautmann has documented the remarkable travels of the institution of the war elephant from the subcontinent to other parts of the world.[40] Its westward spread was the result of military encounters, king-to-king exchanges, battlefield capture, gifts, and tribute. Its eastward spread to Southeast Asia coincided with the emergence of kingdoms, resulted from king-to-king contacts, and was part of a larger process of cultural transmission. The Indian idea of the fourfold army (*caturaṅga-bala*) and the war elephant are represented in sculptural reliefs at Angkor Wat, and references to the arrays and counter arrays (*vyūhas* and *prativyūhas*) of Indian texts occur in descriptions of Southeast Asian military practice as late as the seventeenth century.[41] Knowledge of elite hunting styles and practices also spread across the ancient and medieval worlds and led to the eventual homogenization of the royal hunt across large parts of Eurasia.[42]

While the cultural interactions between India and Southeast Asia are recognized, though inadequately understood, much less is known about interactions between India and China, beyond the travels of silk and Buddhism. Sanskrit poetry and poetic theory seems to have influenced the Recent Style poetry that emerged in China in the sixth century. The “Six Laws” of the Chinese theory of painting seem to be modeled on the “Six Limbs” of Indian theory, although the idea was naturalized after absorption.[43] Victor H. Mair argues that this was a small part of a much larger phenomenon of cultural interaction between ancient India and ancient China, in which Buddhism was the main, but not the only, vehicle of transmission. In the sphere of political ideas, there is a striking similarity between the *Arthashastra* and *Sun Zi* in the importance attached to secret agents and secret practices. Mair also draws attention to many similarities between the discussion of siege tactics in the Chinese *Mo Zi* (fifth / fourth century BCE) and the Greek military tactician Aineias’ *Tactics* (circa 350 BCE).[44] It can be added that some of the features of siege warfare in these two texts—such as the emphasis on mechanical devices, tunnels, and counter-tunnels, and the use of asphyxiating tactics in tunnels—are also found in the *Arthashastra*.[45] We are not necessarily looking at

direct borrowings, and there are many differences in ideas, but the possibility of "echoes of a common military heritage" in Eurasia is an exciting idea.[46]

Traders, diplomats, pilgrims, professionals, immigrants, artists, and soldiers were among the agents of transmission of texts, artefacts, and ideas across Asia and Europe. But the most influential were the intellectual and religious elites who brought prestigious expertise and texts to royal courts. Brahmana ritual specialists and intellectuals, learned in Sanskrit texts, traveled to Southeast Asia, indifferent to the Dharmashastra disapproval of sea voyage. Peripatetic Buddhist monks, among whom Faxian and Xuanzang are the best known, were also important agents of religious and intellectual transmission. Monastic reordination practices led to the creation of long-term networks of monastic interaction between Myanmar and Sri Lanka. The latter, with its ancient, strong, and continuous Theravada tradition, was an important, enduring hub in Asian Buddhist networks. The cosmopolitan centers where monks from various lands met for collecting and exchanging texts, ideas, information, and artefacts included Kucha in central Asia, Changan in China, Nalanda in eastern India, Nagarjunakonda in South India, Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, and Srivijaya in Sumatra.[47] Ideas were influenced not only by the circulation of people and texts but also by material objects. The movement of sacred artefacts such as relics, images, plaques, and seals and sealings are especially important in this regard.[48] Even stationary monuments of great renown could and did have enormous impact, as is evident from the powerful role played by the Mahabodhi temple of Bodh Gaya in the Asian Buddhist imagination.

The wide circulation of Indic ideas, including political ideas, in Asia cannot be explained by political conquest (because it was absent), nor by some intrinsic superiority of the language (mostly Sanskrit) in which they were couched. Perhaps the power of the Indian model lay in the existence by the middle of the first millennium of a sophisticated package of well-developed traditions—intellectual (covering many disciplines ranging from politics to dharma), literary, epic, and narrative—all presenting the advantage of being couched in the same language. One prestigious key—Sanskrit—opened many doors. In addition, India offered not one but two powerful and culturally adaptable religious traditions—Hinduism and Buddhism. While a great deal can be said about the flow of ideas from India to Southeast Asia, and to a less extent, East Asia, much less is known

about reverse flows. Although the interactions appear to have been asymmetrical, it seems that Southeast Asia exported more than spices and wood to India and China more than silk.[49] Sheldon Pollock has suggested that as "cosmopolitan cultures abhor and fill vacuums, they also seem to map out spheres of influence that do not overlap."[50] The history of Southeast Asia shows that overlap and hybridity are possible, and that the assertiveness and buoyancy of indigenous cultural elements should not be underestimated. The interactions between cosmopolitan cultures themselves (for instance, the Chinese and Indian) also need more intensive investigation.

By the middle of the first millennium, an Indian cultural package, incorporating political ideas, was on the move. But the idea of nonviolence was not an important part of it. In any case, as has been shown in this book, it is not nonviolence that is the striking feature of ancient Indian political discourse, but a recognition of the tension between violence and nonviolence. This recognition, which emerged from a social ethic that cut across sectarian divides and an engagement, rumination, and debate over more than a thousand years, could not be easily replicated in or transplanted to other lands. It is this tension between violence and nonviolence, reduced to a greatly simplified form by Gandhi and Nehru, that has been central to Indian political thought and civilization from ancient times right down to the present.

Back to Ashoka

We end, as we began, with Ashoka. Although never forgotten within India, Ashoka came to enjoy greater fame in other Asian lands, a fame enhanced by Buddhist legends that celebrated him as a paradigmatic king. As we have seen, these legends do not highlight him as the greatest proponent of nonviolence that the ancient world has ever known. They laud him as a great proselytizer, patron of the sangha, and builder of stupas and shrines. In Sri Lanka, he is the famous father of the famous siblings Mahinda and Sanghamitra, who played an important role in disseminating Buddhism on the island. The memory of Ashoka as a great Buddhist king turns up in different contexts, sometimes unexpectedly. A thirteenth-century inscription from Chaiya in southern Thailand describes a king named Dharmaraja, who had great faith in the Buddha's teaching, as being as skilled in politics (*nīti*) as Dharmasoka.[51] Burma retains a long memory of Ashoka's connection with the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya.[52] China has a tradition of "Ashoka statues," believed to have appeared in mysterious circumstances and associated with supernatural powers, especially for foretelling crises in the fortunes of kings.[53]

In his inscriptions, Ashoka projects himself as a cosmopolitan king engaged with his western counterparts—he mentions several of his Hellenistic contemporaries and claims to have won victory through dhamma in their domain. And yet, western sources seem to have ignored him completely. There is one possible exception. A long inscription in the demotic script (originally found in Cairo and now housed in the Berlin Museum), inscribed on a late first-century BCE jar, narrates the story of a swallow who tried to drink the ocean.[54] The tale is a familiar one, as is its moral: Pride goes before a fall. Variants are found in the Indian *Panchatantra* and in the Jewish *Aggadah,* and there may be traces in Plutarch's *Septum Sapientium Convivium.* But it is the narrative frame of the story that interests us here. The inscription on the jar informs us that the story of the swallow and the sea was told to the Egyptian pharaoh in a letter written to him by Aouesky, a great prince of the land of Arabia, who compared the Pharoah's desire to invade Arabia to the swallow's attempt to drink the ocean. We seem to be looking at an eastern fable that was given an Egyptian frame. In view of the similarity between

Aouesky and Ashoka, and the fact that Egyptian texts frequently connect Arabia with India, this could be a reference to the Maurya emperor.[55] Once again, this is not a memory of the Ashoka who had so passionately denounced war and propagated nonviolence. It seems to be one of an emperor who realized, perhaps too late in life, that his hubris had led to self-destruction, and who advised another emperor against falling into the same trap.

As discussed in the beginning of this book, Ashoka is a powerful presence in the emblems of the Indian state and in modern understandings of ancient India. In recent years, he has been appropriated by the Kushwaha caste of north Bihar, who claim to be his direct descendants. He has also been turned into a regional icon; the Bihar government has invented a birthday for him (by a happy coincidence, B. R. Ambedkar's birthday) and declared it a state holiday. Such political appropriations illustrate how ancient symbols and ideas are frames into which all sorts of meanings can be poured, regardless of their historical foundations or veracity.

The idea of a peace-loving, nonviolent India exists, persists, as part of a selectively constructed and assiduously cultivated national self-image in the midst of a society pervaded by social and political violence. It lives along with the memory of the three great ideologues of nonviolence in ancient India—Mahavira, the Buddha, and Ashoka. But the amnesia toward the contexts of intense social and political conflict and violence in which these thinkers emerged and with which they engaged often reduces them to simplified stereotypes, invoked from time to time for self-congratulatory rhetoric or political gain. Ambedkar simplified and idealized Buddhism, molding it to suit the needs of a program for social equity. Gandhi and Nehru helped create the myth of a nonviolent ancient India while building an independence movement on the principle of nonviolence. Today, this idea is being consciously and systematically challenged by a new politically inspired aggressive idea of Indian-ness, which is more in line with Savarkar's thought. It is too early to say which of these invented images will prevail in the long run.

But between the extremes of idealized nonviolence and violence lies another possibility, which has been explored in this book—of reconstructing the tension between violence and nonviolence in ancient Indian political history and thought, recognizing the elements of convergence and divergence, continuity and change in perspectives. As we have seen, the steady invisibilizing and justification of political

violence in ancient India never completely closed the doors to questioning, critique, dissent, and doubt. Does India possess the ability to recognize and confront the realities of her violent past and present, and to carry forward the debate on political violence with the seriousness with which her intellectuals initiated it over two thousand years ago? It is not possible to give definite answers, but the questions urge us to reflect deeply on the unpredictable and potentially volatile nature of the relationship between the present and the past. Finally, the ancient Indian debates on political violence have an importance beyond Indian history, identity, and political thought. They help us understand how this issue was understood in the ancient world, and they also form a valuable resource for thinking about the problem of escalating political violence in our own time.

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Glossary

MANY OF THE Sanskrit and Tamil terms used in this book are complex and difficult to translate into English. Many have a variety of meanings and nuances, which vary according to context. Readers unfamiliar with this vocabulary can use this glossary as a general guide.

abhiṣeka: royal consecration

adharma: that which is contrary to dharma; impiety; unrighteousness

agrahāra: land or village gifted by a king to a Brahmana

ahiṁsā: nonviolence; non-injury

akam: Sangam love poems

ānṛśaṁsya: compassion

anujīvin: royal dependent; courtier

anvīkṣikī: philosophy

āpad-dharma: duties in time of emergency

apsaras: nymph; a female celestial being

araṇya: wilderness; forest

arhat: one who has attained liberation from the cycle of rebirth

artha: material gain or well-being; wealth

arthaśāstra: the science of statecraft or politics; the discipline of political economy

āśrama: life-stage; in the classical theory, the four sequential life

stages—celibate studenthood *(brahmacarya),* householdership *(gṛhastha),* partial renunciation *(vānaprastha),* and complete renunciation *(saṁnyāsa);* hermitage of a sage

asura: demon

aśvamedha: the "horse sacrifice," a premier royal sacrifice associated with political paramountcy and fertility

āṭavikas: forest people; forest chieftains

ātman: soul

avatāra: incarnation (especially associated with the god Vishnu)

bhakti: devotion

bhikkhu / bhikṣu: monk, especially a Buddhist monk

bhikkhuni / bhikṣuṇī: nun, especially a Buddhist nun

bodhisattva: a Buddha-to-be; used for Siddhartha before he attained enlightenment, as well as for a series of beings that became the focus of worship in Mahayana Buddhism

brahmacārin: celibate student

brahmacarya: the life-stage of celibate studenthood

brahmadeya: land or village granted to a Brahmana or Brahmanas

brahman: universal soul

Brahmana: the *varṇa* associated with Vedic learning and the performance of sacrifices

cakravarti-kṣetra: the field of victory of a *cakravartin*

cakravartin / cakkavatti: a paramount king with extensive victories; emperor

caṇḍāla: an "untouchable"

caturaṅga-bala: fourfold army, consisting of infantry, elephant corps, cavalry, and chariot riders

caturvarga: the four goals of human existence—dharma, *artha, kāma,* and *mokṣa*

daṇḍa: force; punishment; justice; army

daṇḍanīti: the science of politics or statecraft

dāsa: slave; barbarian

dasyu: barbarian

deva: god

dhamma: the Prakrit form of dharma

dharma-vijaya / dhamma-vijaya: righteous victory

dharma: virtue; duty; righteousness; the appropriate conduct of an individual as part of a larger social group; the moral order; the Buddha's doctrine (in Buddhism); the doctrines of the Jinas (in Jainism)

digvijaya: victory over the quarters

gaṇa: oligarchy

gandharva: a celestial being

gṛhastha: the householder stage; householder

guṇas: qualities; the six measures of foreign policy

hiṁsā: violence

Jina: literally "victor"; saint (especially Jaina)

kāma: sensual pleasure

kaṇṭakaśodhana: punishment of those guilty of criminal offenses

karma / karman: the idea that actions have consequences whose impact is felt across several births

kāvya: literature

kṣatra: the power of the Kshatriya

Kshatrapa: governors or subordinate rulers of the Shakas

Kshatriya: the *varṇa* associated with fighting wars and ruling

mahājanapada: great state

mahākāvya: a long poem consisting of several cantos

mahārāja: "great king," a royal title

mahārājādhirāja: "great king of kings," an imperial title

mātsya-nyāya / matsya-nyāya: literally, "the law of the fish," where the big fish eat the smaller ones; a state of social anarchy where the strong oppress the weak

mleccha: a generic term for foreigners and tribals; barbarian

mokṣa: freedom from the cycle of birth and death

natukal: memorial stone

nigoda: single-sense organisms in the Jaina theory of reality

Nishadas: a forest tribe

nīti: governance; politics

nītiśāstra: the science of statecraft or politics

pāpa: sin

parihāra: exemptions and privileges associated with royal land grants

pāruṣya: injury

prajā: subjects

praśasti: panegyric, especially in inscriptions

puṇya: religious merit

puram: Sangam war poems

purohita: a Brahmana royal chaplain

puruṣārtha: the legitimate goals (three or four) of human existence

raja-maṇḍala: the circle of kings

rājan: king

rājarṣi: a sage-like king

rājasūya: a royal sacrifice associated with consecration

rājya: kingdom

rākṣasa: demon

ṛṣi*:* sage

śaktis: the three powers of the king—of military might, energy, and counsel

sāmanta: neighboring king; subordinate king; feudatory

sāmānya-dharma / sādhāraṇa-dharma: the dharma applicable to all, regardless of *varṇa,* age, or gender

saṁnyāsa: the life-stage of total renunciation

saṁnyāsin: one who has entered the life-stage of total renunciation

saṅgha (sangha): monastic order; oligarchy

saptāṅga rājya: the seven-limbed state

śāstra: technical treatise

Savarthasiddha: the name of Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, in Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita*

Shudra: the lowest *varṇa,* associated with menial work and serving the higher *varṇas*

śramaṇa / samana: renunciant; monk

stupa: funerary mound; a Buddhist religious structure, sometimes containing relics

tīrthaṅkara: Jaina saint

trivarga: the three goals of human existence—dharma, *artha,* and *kāma*

upāyas: the four expedients—conciliation, gifts, force, and creating dissension

Vaishya: the *varṇa* associated with farming, animal husbandry, and trade

vājapeya: a royal sacrifice connected with power and prosperity

vana: forest

vānaprastha: the life-stage of partial renunciation; partial renunciant

vānara: monkey

varṇa: literally "color"; the normative theory of a hierarchy of four hereditary social classes—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—each associated with a specific range of functions (the Buddhists and Jainas place the Kshatriya above the Brahmana)

varṇa-saṁkara: literally, "mixture of varṇas"; refers to a situation of social chaos where the members of the *varṇas* do not follow the prescribed vocations and marry and procreate with other *varṇas*

vārttā: economics; livelihoods

vidūṣaka: a comic friend of the hero in Sanskrit drama, usually a Brahmana

vidyā: knowledge

vijigīṣu: the king desirous of victory

vinaya: discipline; self-control

virakal: hero stone

vrata: religious vow

vyasanas: vices or addictions; the four vices of the king—hunting, gambling, drinking, and womanizing

vyavahāra: laws related to legal transactions between two parties

vyūhas: battle arrays

yajña: sacrifice

yakṣa: a demigod

yuddha: war

yugas: the four ages—Krita, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali—marked by a systematic decline of dharma, constituting the primary cycle in the cyclical theory of time

Abbreviations

AA:
: *Ashokavadana*

Abhi.:
: *Abhijnanashakuntala*

AS:
: *Arthashastra*

BC:
: *Buddhacharita*

BS:
: *Brihatsamhita*

CII:
: *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*

Mbh.:
: *Mahabharata*

MR:
: *Mudrarakshasa*

MS:
: *Manusmriti* (*Manava Dharmashastra*)

NS:
: *Nitisara*

PT:

Panchatantra

Ram.:

Ramayana

RV:

Raghuvamsha

Notes

Introduction

1. Debate on the national flag, Constituent Assembly of India, July 22, 1947, http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol4p7.htm. That the elements of the flag could be interpreted in many different ways made it well suited to the new pluralistic nation. See Arundhati Virmani, *A National Flag for India: Rituals, Nationalism and the Politics of Sentiment* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008), 3, 312.

2. There were apparently no deliberations or debate on this issue in the Constituent Assembly. See Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia's Lions* (Mumbai: Marg, [2005] 2008), 173–175; and Appendix 5 by Udaybhanusinh.

3. This quotation may have been the contribution of S. Radhakrishnan, a scholar whose writings included a translation and commentary on the eighteen principal Upanishads, and who was to become the second president of India; but Nehru too was an ardent admirer of Upanishadic philosophy.

4. See Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Pradip Kumar Datta and Sanjay Palshikar, eds., *Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Social Science Research and Oxford University Press, 2013); *Political Science* 3, gen. ed., Achin Vanaik, Introduction; Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

5. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, [1946] 1999). See especially chapters 4 and 5.

6. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (Delhi: Ajanta, [1989] 1995).

7. Mahadev Desai, trans. and ed., *The Gospel of Selfless Action or The Gita according to Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Mudranalaya 1946), 133–134. The philosophical richness and complexity of the *Bhagavadgita* is indicated by the large number of interpretations and commentaries that it has inspired over the centuries. See Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji, eds., *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sanjay Palshikar, *Evil and the Philosophy of Retribution: Modern Commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014); Richard H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

8. B. R. Ambedkar, "The Untouchables," and "Buddha or Karl Marx?," in *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar,* ed. Valerian Rodrigues (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 114–118, 183–185.

9. V. D. Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History,* trans. from the Marathi and ed. S. T. Godbole (Bombay: Bal Savarkar, 1971). For a larger discussion, see Vinayak Chaturvedi, "Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V. D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita and Histories of Warfare," in *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India,* ed. Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 155–176.

10. See Jan Gonda, "Why Are *Ahimsa* and Similar Concepts Often Expressed in a Negative Form?," in Jan Gonda, *Four Studies in the Language of the Veda* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959), 95–117.

11. We will leave out, for the time being, the question of violence directed against oneself. The question of suicide, including ritual or religious suicide, involves a range of separate issues.

12. Gonda, "Why Are *Ahimsa* and Similar Concepts Often Expressed in a Negative Form?," 116.

13. See Mukund Lath, "The Concept of Āṇṛśaṁsya in the Mahābhārata," in *The Mahābhārata Revisited,* ed. R. N. Dandekar, papers presented at the International Seminar on the Mahābhārata organized by the Sahita Akademi at New Delhi on February 17–20, 1987 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990), 113–119; J. L. Mehta, "The Discourse of Violence in the Mahabharata," in J. L. Mehta, *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research and Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990), 256; Sibaji Bandopadhay, "A Critique of Nonviolence," *Seminar,* no. 607 (2010), http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/608/608); Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 202–209.

14. Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2006), 5.39, 5.44. *Manavadharmashastra / Manusmriti* has hereafter been abbreviated *MS*.

15. The goals of human existence are dharma (righteousness), *artha* (material gain), *kāma* (sensual pleasure), and liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa*). The four *varṇas* are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The four life stages (*āśramas*) are *brahmacarya* (celibate studenthood), *gṛhastha* (the householder stage), *vānaprastha* (partial renunciation), and *saṁnyāsa* (complete renunciation). These will be discussed further in Chapter 1. According to V. P. Varma, in *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations,* 3rd revised and enlarged ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1954] 1974), 215–217, the metaphysical foundations of ancient Indian political thought had important implications for the kinds of questions that were and were not asked in the political sphere. He argues that the metaphysics of karma and dharma ruled out raising problems such as the individual versus the state, politics versus ethics, and the political accountability of the king to the people. As we shall see, the latter two issues *are* raised in ancient Indian thought.

16. Amartya Sen, "The Argumentative Indian," in Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 3–33.

17. See, for instance, Denis Vidal, Gilles Tarabout, and Eric Meyer, eds., *Violence / Non-violence—Some Hindu Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar and Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2003); and Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij, eds., *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

18. For the former, see Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970); for the latter, Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40. Recently, Steven Pinker, in *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011), has provocatively suggested that the origins of the state actually led to a decrease in the incidence of violence. This is difficult to prove empirically for ancient societies, where statistical data is completely absent.

19. See, for instance, Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: Brill, 1969); Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty,* trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Zone Books, [1948] 1988).

20. Louis Dumont, "The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 6 (1962): 48–77.

21. J. C. Heesterman, "The Conundrum of the King's Authority," in J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 108–127.

22. Ibid., 112.

23. See, for instance, Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980).

24. For the Mauryas, see Romila Thapar, *The Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984); Gerard Fussman, "Central and Provincial Administration in Ancient India: The Problem of the Mauryan Empire," *Indian Historical Review* 14, nos. 1–2 (1987–1988): 43–72. For the Guptas, see R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, c. 300–1200* (New Delhi: Macmillan, [1965] 1980). For a discussion of the different perspectives on these periods, see Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), chaps. 7, 9.

25. See B. D. Chattopadhyaya, " 'Autonomous Spaces' and the Authority of the State," in B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues* (Delhi:

Permanent Black, 2003), 135–152.

26. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (Delhi: Permanent Black, [2006] 2007). Earlier important works on political ideas include those by K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1924); U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas: The Ancient Period and the Period of Transition to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1959] 1966); R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1959); Bhasker Anand Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963). John W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India: A Study of Kingship from the Earliest Times to Circa A.D. 300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Hartmut Scharfe, *The State in the Indian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

27. While I begin my story in the sixth century BCE, it should be noted that there is a continuing debate among scholars on the date of the Buddha. While dates for the Buddha's death and life have tended to be pushed forward in time, the results of the recent excavations at the site of Lumbini suggest the possibility that the earlier date, placing his death in 544 / 543 BCE, may not be off the mark. See R. A. E. Coningham, K. P. Acharya, K. M. Strickland, C. E. Davis, M. J. Manuel, I. A. Simpson, K. Gilliland, J. Tremblay, T. C. Kinnaird, and D. C. W.Sanderson, "The Earliest Buddhist Shrine: Excavating the Birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini (Nepal)," *Antiquity* 87, no. 338 (2013): 1104–1123.

1. Walter Ruben, "Some Problems of the Ancient Indian Republics," in *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf: A Scholar and Revolutionary, 1903–1962,* ed. Horst Kruger (Delhi: People's Publishing, [1966] 1969), 5–29.

2. For details, see Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the Twelfth Century* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), 257–273.

3. In this book, the term "sovereignty" is used in the sense of claims to political paramountcy over a large number of other states. It does not carry the meaning that it has in modern political theory, philosophy of law, or international relations, where its origins are often traced to the Westphalian state system. Even in the western tradition, the classic definition given by F. H. Hinsley in *Sovereignty* (2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 1)—"final and absolute political authority in the political community"—has been questioned, and there is no consensus on what should replace it. See Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, "Sovereignty: Outline of a Conceptual History," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 16, no. 4 (1991): 424–446; James J. Sheenan, "The Problem of Sovereignty in European History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (2006): 1–15; Stephen D. Kramer, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

4. See Jarrod L. Whitaker, *Strong Arms and Drinking Strength: Masculinity, Violence, and the Body in Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

5. See Joel P. Brereton, "Dhárman in the RgVeda," and Patrick Olivelle, "The Semantic History of Dharma in the Middle and Late Vedic Periods," in *Dharma: Studies in Its Semantic, Cultural and Religious History,* ed. Patrick Olivelle (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 26–67, 69–89.

6. *Rigveda* 10.90.

7. These are expressed in terms such as *sāmrājya* (empire) and *samrāṭ* (emperor).

8. Michael Witzel, "Early Sanskritization Origins and Development of the Kuru State," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 1–26.

9. See Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eighth–Fourth Centuries BC as Reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

10. For details, see J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 80–96. On the *rājasūya,* see J. C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: The Rājasūya Described According to the Yajus texts and Annotated* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).

11. See, for instance, Louis Dumont, "The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 6 (1962): 48–77. Dumézil (*Mitra—Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty,* trans. Derek Coltman [New York: Zone Books, (1948) 1988]) suggests that although Mitra and Varuna represent a true symbiosis, Varuna possessed a kind of superiority.

12. Theodore N. Proferes, *Vedic Ideas of Sovereignty and the Poetics of Power* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2007).

13. The references to nonviolence occur in *Chhandogya Upanishad* 3.16.1 and 3.17.4. For an analysis of the complex and ambivalent attitudes towards violence in the Vedic and other early Brahmanical texts, see Laurie L. Patton, "Telling Stories about Harm: An Overview of Early Indian Narratives," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice,* ed. John R. Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), 11–38.

14. For the first view, see J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2–6; and "Brahmin, Ritual, and Renouncer," in *The Inner Conflict of Tradition,* 26–44. Heesterman calls this reform of ritual an "axial breakthrough." For the second view, see Whitaker, *Strong Arms and Drinking Strength.*

15. See Henk W. Bodewitz, "Hindu Ahiṁsā and Its Roots," and Jan E. M. Houben, "To Kill or Not to Kill: The Sacrificial Animal (Yajña-Paśu)? Arguments and Perspectives in Brahmanical Ethical Philosophy," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History,* ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Boston: Brill, 1999), 17–44, 105–183.

16. For a detailed discussion of different aspects of this issue, see the very thought-provoking essays of Patrick Olivelle in his *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions* (London: Anthem Press, 2011; Indian edition, 2012). Also see T. N. Madan, ed., *Way of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer—Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1982).

17. See Heesterman, "Brahmin, Ritual, and Renouncer," 43–44.

18. See Rupert Gethin, "Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 167–202.

19. Ibid. 171–174.

20. *Sutta Nipata*; K. R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses (Sutta Nipāta),* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Pali Text Society, [1992] 2001), 19.

21. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, [1979] 2001), 167–172.

22. The Shvetambaras made some exceptions; meat could be consumed in order to cure an illness or in times of famine.

23. See Paul Dundas, "The Non-Violence of Violence: Jain Perspectives on Warfare, Asceticism and Worship," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice,* ed. John R. Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), 46–55.

24. P. V. Kane, in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* volumes, places the early Dharmasutras in the sixth century BCE. Patrick Olivelle dates the earliest Dharmasutra, that of Apastamba, between the third and early second century BCE (see Patrick Olivelle, "Patañjali and the Beginnings of Dharmaśāstra: An Alternate History of Early Dharmasūtra Production," in *Aux Abord de la Clarière. Études indiennes et comparées en l'honneur de Charles Malamoud,* ed. Silvia D'Intino and Caterina Guenzi [Bibliothèque de l'École des Haute Études, Sciences religieuses; Turnhout: Brepols, 2012], 117–133).

25. Henk W. Bodewitz, "Hindu Ahiṁsā and Its Roots," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History,* ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Boston: Brill, 1999), 22–23.

26. Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.

27. For details, see P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 2, part 1, 3rd ed., (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, [1941] 1990), 696–704.

28. *Manusmriti* 3.68–71. References are to Patrick Olivelle's edition of the text titled *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2006). *Manusmriti* has hereafter been abbreviated to *MS*.

29. For details of the *saṁnyāsin*'s regimen, see Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 2, part 1, 696–704, 933, 937, 955.

30. Olivelle, *Ascetics and Brahmins,* 56–59.

31. See J. C. Heesterman, "Brahmin, Ritual, and Renouncer."

32. Parshvanatha was the son of King Ashvasena, king of Benaras, and Queen Vama. Arishtanemi was the son of King Samudravijaya and queen Shiva.

33. In Buddhism, the *dharmas* (plural) also refer to the basic qualities that constitute reality.

34. Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sutras,* part 1 (1884; reprint ed. New York: Dover, 1968), in *Sacred Books of the East,* gen. ed. Max Muller, 22:189–225. I have used the term "victor" instead of the usual translation "conqueror," because as I will argue farther down, the former is more accurate.

35. *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* 18 lists the following: Bharata, Sagara, Maghavan, Sanatkumara, Shanti, Kunthu, Ara, Mahapadma, Harishena, Jaya, Dasharnabhadra, Karakandu of Kalinga, Dvimukha of Panchala, Nami of Videha, Udayana of Sauvira, Nandana of Kashi, Vijaya, Mahabala (Hermann Jacobi trans. and F. Max Muller, ed., *Jaina Sūtras,* part 2 [1984, Reprint ed. Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1996], 80–88). Of these, Mahapadma, Shanti, Kunthu, and Ara became respectively the ninth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth *tīrthaṅkaras*.

36. Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras,* part 2, *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* 9, 40. This king became a Pratyekabuddha, one who has attained perfection through his own effort, not through instruction.

37. Janavasabha Sutta; Maurice Walsche, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of*

the Dīgha Nikāya (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, [1987] 1995), 291–292.

38. On the various other possible meanings of the term *cakravartin,* see Hartmut Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 51–55; and Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship,* 123–128. Apart from being the wheel of a chariot, the *cakra* is also a weapon, associated with the god Vishnu.

39. This is evident from the Buddha's assertion that he had been a wheel-turning, righteous king many times. See E. M. Hare, trans., *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikāya) or More-Numbered Suttas,* vol. 4 (London: Luzac and Co., for the Pali Text Society, [1935] 1965), 54.

40. For the thirty-two signs, see the Lakkhana Sutta, in Maurice Walsche, *The Long Discourses,* 441–460. The signs include long earlobes, long arms, a protuberance on top of the head, and webbed hands and feet.

41. Ibid., 264.

42. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 115.

43. The Pali terms are *cakka, hatthi, ass, mani, itthi, gahapati,* and *pariṇāyaka.*

44. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṁyutta Nikāya,* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1594–1595.

45. *Aggañña* means what is first, foremost, original, primary. The term *sutta* (from the Sanskrit *sūtra*) refers to texts in dialogue form believed to contain the words of the Buddha. The following discussion is based on Steven Collins' translation, *Aggañña Sutta: The Discourse on What Is Primary, An Annotated Translation from Pali* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2001).

46. Ibid., 46.

47. Ibid., 49.

48. B. G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966): 20. Also see Gokhale's essay, "Dhammiko Dhammarāja: A Study in Buddhist Constitutional Concepts," in *Indica: The Indian Historical Research Institute Silver Jubilee Commemoration volume* (1953): 161–165.

49. Walshe, *The Long Discourses,* 279–290.

50. Ibid., 286.

51. Ibid., 287.

52. Ibid., 395–405.

53. Ibid., 398.

54. Sevitabbasevitabba Sutta; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, [1995] 2009), 914. These issues are also discussed in the Saleyyaka Sutta; Walshe, *The Long Discourses,* 379–385.

55. Sevitabbasevitabba Sutta; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses,* 914.

56. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses,* 1053–1055.

57. Kutadanda Sutta; Walshe, *The Long Discourses,* 138.

58. Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses,* 209–210.

59. Mara is an evil being who is said to have tried vigorously but unsuccessfully to tempt the Buddha to abandon his mediation when the latter was on the verge of enlightenment.

60. Lakkhana Sutta; Walsche, *The Long Discourses,* 443.

61. See A. B. Bosworth, "The Historical Setting of Megasthenes' Indica," *Classical Philology* 91, no. 2 (1996): 113–127; Duane W. Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," in *Brill's New Jacoby,* ed. Ian Worthington (Brill Online, 2012), www.brillonline.nl

62. For a detailed discussion of the epithet *devānaṁpiya* and its absence in Buddhist legends of Ashoka, see Madhav M. Deshpande, "Interpreting the Aśokan Epithet Devānaṃpiya," in *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory,* ed. Patrick Olivelle (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 19–45. The name "Asoka" occurs in the minor rock edict 1 at Maski, Udegolam, Nittur, and Gujjara.

63. There are a few inscriptions (the Piprahwa casket, Sohgaura and Mahasthan inscriptions) that may be pre-Ashokan, but their dates are debated. For a list of Ashokan edicts, see F. R. Allchin and K. R. Norman, "Guide to the Aśokan Inscriptions," *South Asian Studies,* 1 (1985): 43–50; and K. R. Norman, "The Languages of the Composition and Transmission of the Aśokan Inscriptions," in *Reimagining Aśoka,* ed. Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, and H. P. Ray (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38–62. For a catalogue of the inscriptions, see Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts* (Mainz am Rheim: Verlag Philipp

Zabern, 2006). In this book, for the text of the inscriptions, I have principally relied on the following sources: E. Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* vol. 1: *Inscriptions of Aśoka* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, [1924] 1991); D. C. Sircar, *Aśokan Studies* (Calcutta: Indian Museum, [1979] 2000); B. N. Mukherjee, *Studies in Aramaic Edicts of Aśoka* (Calcutta: Indian Museum, 2000). In some places in this chapter, the more familiar Sanskrit forms of certain words have been used. Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Some of the ideas in this chapter were first expressed in my "Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Aśoka," *South Asian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2012): 131–145.

64. The pillars at Rampurva, Sankisa, Kausambi, and Vaishali may be pre-Ashokan, perhaps even pre-Maurya.

65. Sections of the separate rock edicts are also found on a stone slab at Sannati, which, in addition, bears sections of rock edicts 12 and 14.

66. See Mukherjee, *Studies in Aramaic Edicts of Aśoka;* Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts.* Harry Falk ("The Diverse Degrees of Authenticity of Aśokan Texts," in *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory,* ed. Patrick Olivelle [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass], 2009, 5–18) has argued that the Aramaic Taxila and Laghman inscriptions were not issued by Ashoka.

67. *Dāta* means "law," and *qšṭ* means "truth"; *eusebeia* means "holiness" or "piety." Apart from *eusebeia,* the semantic range of dharma overlaps with other Greek concepts such as *dike* (justice), *dikaiosune* (righteousness or a sense of justice), and *arete* (excellence or, more generally, virtue).

68. The dates in Ashoka's inscriptions are to be understood as expired years.

69. The absence of the use of the first person and the considerable variations in the content of the Aramaic and Greek inscriptions indicate greater freedom given to local officials in this respect in the northwest.

70. For a sensitive and archaeologically grounded account of the development of Ashoka's ideas, see Nayanjot Lahiri, *Ashoka in Ancient India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black and Ashoka University, 2015).

71. New inscriptions continue to be discovered. A version of minor rock edict 1 was recently found at Ratanpurwa in Bihar (K. V. Ramesh and T. S. Ravishankar, "Basaha [Bihar State] Minor Rock Inscription of Aśoka," *Epigraphia Indica* 43, pt. 1 [2011–2012]: 1–4).

72. The terms *janapada, viṣaya,* and *vijita* (literally, "that over which victory has been achieved") are used for the kingdom. The phrase *lājā Magadhe* ("king of Magadha") occurs in the Bairat-Calcutta minor rock edict, the reference to Pataliputra in rock edict 5, and the boast of his vast empire in rock edict 14.

73. Rock edict 2.

74. Antiyoka is identified with Antiochus II Theos of Syria; Turamaya with Ptolemy II Philadelphos of Egypt; Antikini with Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia; Maka with Magas of Cyrene in north Africa; and Alikasudara with Alexander of Epirus or Alexander of Corinth.

75. Calcutta-Bairat minor rock edict 3 (also known as the Bhabru edict).

76. A Buddhist imprint can also be seen in the reference to the white elephant bringing happiness to the whole world on the Girnar rock; the figure of an elephant and the word *gajatame* ("the best elephant") inscribed at Kalsi; and the elephant and the word *seto* ("the white one," that is, the white elephant) at Dhauli. According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha-to-be entered his mother's womb in the form of a white elephant. The white elephant also has a symbolic significance in Jainism—it features in the dreams of the mothers of some of the *tirthaṅkaras*.

77. The Kalinga war is not mentioned in Buddhist texts, which describe Ashoka's transformation as having been the result of his encounters with certain Buddhist monks.

78. Rock edict 3, lines 4–6.

79. Rock edict 11, lines 1–4.

80. Reference to these elements of dhamma are mentioned in many edicts. Certain virtues are *not* mentioned specifically—for instance, chastity, temperance and honesty. Of course, these could theoretically have come within the purview of self-control.

81. Pillar edict 3 enumerates the following sins (*āsinavas*): fierceness (*caṁḍiye*), cruelty (*niṭhuliye*), anger (*kodhe*), pride (*māne*), and envy (*isyā*). Rock edict 10 urges the need to avoid the danger (*parisava*) of demerit (*apuṁñya*).

82. Rock edict 6, separate rock edict 2.

83. The wider currency of the ethical ideas we see in Ashoka's edicts is matched with the impression we get from their sculptural elements. See Upinder Singh, "Texts on Stone: Understanding Aśoka's Epigraph-Monuments and Their Changing Contexts," *Indian Historical Review* 24, nos. 1–2 (1998): 6–13.

84. Rock edict 13, which refers to the Kaliṅga war, which occurred years after Ashoka's consecration, was not inscribed in Kaliṅga itself, probably because it may have touched a raw nerve among its inhabitants. Here, in place of rock edicts 11, 12 and 13, we have two edicts known as separate rock edicts 1 and 2. The separate rock edicts are also inscribed (in place of rock edict 13) at Sannati in Karnataka.

85. Gokhale, "Dhammiko Dhammarāja," 162.

86. According to K. R. Norman, the inscription refers to an allowance for three days given to prisoners who were released after receiving corporal punishment. He sees here a reference to the introduction of a system of after-prison care. Norman thinks it impossible that Ashoka would have allowed the practice of capital punishment, given his commitment to nonviolence. See K. R. Norman, "Aśoka and Capital Punishment: Notes on a Portion of Aśoka's Fourth Pillar Edict, with Appendix on the Accusative Absolute Construction," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 [1975]: 16–24).

87. See Ronald G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1953), American Oriental Series, vol. 33, 107–157.

88. A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 185–211.

89. Patrick Olivelle, "The Semantic History of Dharma in the middle and late Vedic Periods." Alf Hiltebeitel (*Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011]) identifies a series of "Dharma texts" of ancient India, which include Ashoka's edicts, and calls this king a "watershed figure" in the history of dharma.

90. It should be noted that "epic" is a western category. In the Indian tradition, the *Mahabharata* is *itihāsa* (traditional history) and the *Ramayana* is the *ādikāvya* (the first poem). The composition of the *Mahabharata* is generally placed between circa 400 BCE and 400 CE. Hiltebeitel suggests a shorter period from the mid-second century BCE to the turn of the millennium. As for the *Ramayana,* Robert P. Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1984] 2007), 1:23, dates its composition to circa 750–500 BCE, while John L. Brockington, *Righteous Rāma: The Evolution of an Epic* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) places it between circa 500 BCE and 300 CE, identifying different stages in the evolution of the epic up to and even after the twelfth century. My discussion of the epics and the references given in the various chapters are based on the critical editions of the texts. For the *Ramayana,* see G. H. Bhat and U. P. Shah, gen. eds., *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Critical Edition,* 7 vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975). For the *Mahabharata,* see V. S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya, eds., *The Mahābhārata, for the First Time Critically Edited,* 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966). Digital versions of these are available, thanks to the effort of John D. Smith and Muneo Tokunaga. I have also benefited from the various English translations of the epics. For the *Ramayana,* there are translations by Robert P. Goldman and others. For the *Mahabharata,* there are the ongoing University of Chicago Press translations of the books of the *Mahabharata,* as well as John D. Smith's abridged translation. Hereafter, *Mahabharata* has been abbreviated to *Mbh.* and *Ramayana* to *Ram.* Generic references are to the critical editions. Specific publications and page numbers have been cited only where translations are quoted.

91. Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 18–20.

92. See Nicholas Sutton, *Religious Doctrines in the Mahābhārata* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).

93. See Bimal Matilal, "Moral Dilemmas: Insights from the Epics," in *Ethics and Epics: The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal,* ed. Jonardon Ganeri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22–23.

94. *Mbh.* 12.67.15–16; James L. Fitzgerald, trans., *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7 (The Book of the Women; The Book of Peace, Part One) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 335.

95. *Mbh.* 12.68.10–29.

96. Bhishma had been given a boon by his father that he could choose the time of his

death.

97. The seven elements are the king (*svāmin*), minister (*amātya*), the land and its people (*janapada*), fortress (*durga*), treasury (*kośa*), force or justice (*daṇḍa*), and ally (*mitra*).

98. The word *cakravartin* occurs in *Mbh.* 1.67.29; 1.69.47; 3.88.7; 3.107.1; 3.188.91; 5.114.4; 6.110.10; 12.27.10; 13.75.26; 13.151.42; 14.4.23. Paramountcy is more usually indicated by terms such as *samrājya* (empire) and *samrāṭ* (emperor). The epithets routinely used for ordinary kings include *nṛpa, rājendra, rājā, mahārāja, rāṣṭrīya,* and *viṣāṁpati.*

99. *Mbh.* 1.58.

100. *Mbh.* 12.59.1–134.

101. *Mbh.* 12.59.105–06; Fitzgerald, *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7, 310.

102. *Mbh.* 12.67.17–31.

103. *Mbh.* 12.67.22.

104. *Mbh.* 12.129–67. See Adam Bowles, *Dharma, Disorder and the Political in Ancient India: The Āpaddharmaparvan of the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

105. *Mbh.* 12.139.

106. For details, see Romila Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian in Early India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1, no. 4 (1971): 408–436; Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India: A Study in Attitudes towards Outsiders up to AD 600* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991).

107. *Mbh.* 12.60.7–8; 12.285.23–24.

108. *Mbh.* 8.66.43.

109. There has been much discussion about the meaning of "Shanti" in the title of Book 12 of the *Mahabharata.* It has been suggested that it could refer to the cooling or quieting down of Yudhishthira's anger and grief, or to apotropaic rites (those with the power to avert evil influences or bad luck).

110. *Mbh.* 12.63.25.

111. In order to unnerve Drona, Yudhishthira announces that Drona's son Ashvatthama is dead. The prior killing of an elephant named Ashvatthama and Yudhishthira whispering "the elephant" after his loud pronouncement (so that he had not technically uttered a lie) were not considered honorable.

112. *Mbh.* 12.120.4–6. Fitzgerald, *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7, 465.

113. *Mbh.* 12.56.45.

114. *Mbh.* 12.92.2.

115. *Mbh.*12.56.16. The control of the senses is also woven into the performance of sacrifices and the life of the householder (*Mbh.* 12. 60.47; 12.61.4).

116. *Mbh.* 12.56.36.

117. *Mbh.* 12.56.9–10.

118. *Mbh.* 12.56.40; 12.120.32; 12.88.18–19; 12.57.33; 12.120.3.

119. *Mbh.* 12.66.26.

120. *Mbh.* 12.66.35.

121. See especially *Mbh.* 12.70; 12.121.

122. *Mbh.* 12.122.40–41.

123. *Mbh.* 12.128.23–24.

124. *Mbh.* 12.74.15–17.

125. Angelika Malinar ("Duryodhana's Truths: Kingship and Divinity in Mahābhārata 5.60," in *Battle, Bards and Brāhmins,* Papers of the 13th World Sanskit Conference, ed. John L. Brockington [Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2012], 2:51–78) points out that Duryodhana is associated in the epic with supremacy over nature, which includes mastery over water.

126. Mukund Lath, "The Concept of Ānṛśaṁsya in the *Mahābhārata,*" in *The Mahābhārata Revisited,* ed. R. N. Dandekar, papers presented at the International Seminar on the Mahābhārata organized by the Sahita Akademi, New Delhi, February 17–20, 1987 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990), 113–119.

127. Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata,* 207–214.

128. For example, *Mbh.* 13.116.1, 25; 13.117.37.

129. *Mbh.* 13.117.36.

130. *Mbh.* 4.65.20.

131. *Bhagavadgita* 13.7; J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 122.

132. *Mbh.* 12.76.18–19.
133. *Mbh.* 12.76.35
134. *Mbh.* 12.128.28–29.
135. *Mbh.* 3.196–206.
136. *Mbh.* 12.67.22.
137. *Mbh.* 12.15.20–24; Fitzgerald, *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7, 196.
138. *Mbh.* 12. 58. 21.
139. *Mbh.* 12. 98.1; 12. 98.2–5.
140. *Mbh.* 12. 63. 6.
141. *Mbh.* 1.11.12.
142. *Mbh.* 12.128. 42.
143. *Mbh.* 12.94.4; 12.93.9–10.
144. *Mbh.* 13.60.32–33.
145. There is a close connection between the *Bhagavadgita* and the contents of the preceding book, the Udyoga Parva. See Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
146. Ibid., 15.
147. For a discussion of some of these, see Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji, eds., *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sanjay Palshikar, *Evil and the Philosophy of Retribution: Modern Commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014); Richard H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
148. K. N. Upadhyaya, "The Impact of Early Buddhism on Hindu Thought (with Special Reference to the Bhagavadgītā)," *Philosophy East and West* 18 (1968): 163–173. The frequent reference to *nirvāṇa*—the Buddhist term for salvation—in the *Bhagavadgita* is striking.
149. *Bhagavadgita* 18.53.
150. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā,* 12–13. Malinar's use of the term "cosmological monotheism" is problematic and somewhat misleading.
151. According to Madeleine Biardeau, Krishna embodies the values of renouncer and those of worldly dharma, and Arjuna is the impersonation of the ideal king ("Some Remarks on the Links between the Epics, the Puranas and Their Vedic Sources," in *Studies in Hinduism: Vedism and Hinduism,* ed. G. Oberhammer [Vienna: Der Österreichischen Akademie de Wissenschaften, 1997], 69–177).
152. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā,* 53.
153. *Mbh.* 12.7.24.
154. *Mbh.* 12.24.30.
155. *Mbh.* 1.57.
156. *Mbh.* 12.76.37.
157. *Mbh.* 2.80.17.
158. J. L. Mehta, "The Discourse of Violence in the Mahabharata," in *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research and Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990), 256.
159. The rulers of this kingdom are described as kings of the *vānaras* (monkeys) and *ṛkṣas*. The latter term is sometimes understood as referring to bears, but they were probably a variety of monkeys.
160. *Ram.* 2. 20.
161. Valmiki gives two more reasons why Dasharatha banished his eldest and most beloved son: that Bharata's elevation to the throne was the bride price (*rājya-śulka*) that he had promised Kaikeyi's father-in-law at the time of the marriage; and that he had given Kaikeyi two boons when she saved his life when he was wounded in a war between the gods and the demons. According to Sheldon Pollock (Sheldon Pollock, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 2: *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass (1984), 2007], 27–29), Valmiki may have revised the story to emphasize the two boons in order to make Dasharatha look more noble and to heighten the dramatic quality of the injustice meted out to Rama by a selfish queen.
162. Rama is not, however, described as a *cakravartin.* This term occurs only once in the epic, where Dasharatha is described as having been born in a lineage of *cakravartins* (*Ram.* 5.29.2). Apart from this, there is one reference each to the terms *samrāṭ,* and *sārvabhauma*

(Brockington, *Righteous Rāma,* 125). Kings, even great, powerful ones, usually have the modest epithet *rājan.*

163. *Ram.* 2.67.13; Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 2, 227.

164. Rama himself enumerates Ravana's positive qualities and his flaws after his death (*Ram.* 6.37–38).

165. *Ram.* 6.116.77–90.

166. *Ram.* 6.116.89–90.

167. *Ram.* 6.70.15.

168. *Ram.* 1.2.

169. *Ram.* 1.5.

170. *Ram.* 2.18.36.

171. Mauryan gallery, coin ref. GH 591, coinindia.com.

172. Devendra Handa, "Divinities on Ujjain Coins," Mumbai, 2012 (Prof. K.D. Bajpai Memorial Lecture, delivered in Mumbai in October 2012), published in *Proceedings of Indian Art History Congress*, *22nd Session, 2013* (Mumbai: Indian Art History Congress, Guwahati, 2014), 226–259.

173. For a discussion of these aspects, see Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship,* 6–10.

174. *Mbh.* 12.18.29–34.

175. *Mbh.* 12.89.20.

176. *Mbh.* 12.65.25.

177. James Fitzgerald, Sushil Mittal, and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World* (New York: Routledge [2004] 2005), 53–54; Hiltebeitel's *Dharma* also has a sensitive intertextual analysis of this issue. For a discussion of the importance of dialogue within and across religious traditions, see Brian Black and Laurie Patton, eds., *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

178. *Mbh.* 12.228.1; 12.229

179. *Ram.* 2.98.21.

180. *Mbh.* 12.65.35.

181. *Ram.* 1.26.5; 1.55.10.

1. See Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 110–114; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* 3rd ed. (Pune, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, [1941] 1997) vol. 2, part 2, 1228–1239.

2. For a discussion of the similarities and differences in the political ideas of Ashoka and Kautilya, see Upinder Singh, "Portraits of Power: Aśoka and Kauṭilya," Thirty-First K. P. Jayaswal Memorial lecture, November 27, 2016 (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 2017).

3. Olivelle calls the first major redaction the Kautilya redaction and the second one the Shastric Redaction. (Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance and Law in Ancient India* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013], introduction). For support of the traditional view of the age and authorship of the text, which sees it principally as a Maurya-period work, see R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay: University of Bombay Press, 1965), part 3. Thomas R. Trautmann (*Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text* [Leiden: Brill, 1971]) sees the hands of three or four authors in the text, and suggests that Book 2 may have been compiled by circa 150 CE and the whole text by 250 CE. Hartmut Scharfe (*The State in the Indian Tradition* [Leiden: Brill, 1989], 293) places the compilation of the text in the first or the second century CE, although he admits that some parts may be older. Michael Willis (*The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual: Temples and the Establishment of the Gods* [New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 62) suggests a still later date of the mid-fourth century CE. Olivelle's upper limit for the date of the text is based on the mention of ornamental coral (*pravāla*), which he thinks (as suggested earlier by Sylvain Levi and supported by Scharfe) refers to Mediterranean coral, which Indians became aware of during the period of Indo-Mediterranean trade. This has been contested by Nayanjot Lahiri (*Ashoka in Ancient India* [Ranikhet: Permanent Black and Ashoka University, 2015], 60 and 328–9, n. 44), who points to the abundant archaeological evidence of coral in the subcontinent from the third millennium BCE onward. The *Arthashastra* contains the earliest Indian textual reference to coral (*pravāla*). It is mentioned several times in a general way, along with other precious items such as gold, silver, diamonds, gems, and pearls. *Arthashastra* 2.11.42, however, states specifically that coral (*pravālaka*) comes from Alakanda and Vivarna; the former can be identified with Alexandria in Egypt and the latter, according to the commentator Bhattasvamin, is a coastal region of Yavanadvīpa (land or island of the Yavanas). Here, Kautilya does seem to be referring to coral from the Mediterranean. An assessment of the likely source of the coral found at Northern Black Polished Ware sites might help clinch the issue.

4. For this discussion, I have used the text and translation of the critical edition by R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1965–1972), parts 1 and 2, as well as Olivelle's translation of the critical edition in *King, Governance and Law in Ancient India.* Generic references are to the critical edition; specific editions and page numbers are only cited when translations are quoted. Unless otherwise indicated, translations given are mine. *Arthaśāstra* has henceforth been abbreviated to *AS* in citations.

5. *AS* 1.7.6. It is interesting to note that Vatsyayana in his *Kamasutra,* while also speaking of the need to balance these goals, talks about dharma, *artha,* and *kāma* as a hierarchy in descending order of importance, but also gives an important caveat: He says that *artha* is the most important goal for the king and the prostitute, because it is the basis of social life. Kautilya's assertion of the primacy of *artha* in the context of the king and the state is in harmony with Vatsyayana's caveat.

6. Vatsyayana, author of the *Kamastura,* also states that knowledge of pleasure can be obtained from the *śāstra* or from its practitioner, the man-about-town (*nāgaraka*). On theory and practice, see Sheldon Pollock, "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 3 (1985): 499–519.

7. *AS* 2.10.63.

8. J. C. Heesterman ("Kauṭilya and the Ancient Indian State," in J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* [Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1985], 129–130) suggests that the *Arthashastra* was not very useful as a practical manual of governance and that it was a guide to the art of discussion and argumentation on statecraft.

9. *AS* 1.1.1.

10. The specific authorities (or whose followers) he mentions are Manu, Brihaspati, Ushanas, Bharadvaja, Vishalaksha, Parashara, Pishuna, Kaunapadanta, Vatavyadhi, and Bahudantiputra. Some of the works of authorities cited by Kautilya are known only through citation. The fact that some of the experts are known as authorities on dharma is not surprising, because there was a close relationship between *arthaśāstra* and *dharmaśāstra.*

11. *AS* 15. 1. Olivelle suggests that this chapter was added in the second major redaction of the work. Scharfe (*The State in Indian Tradition,* 262–268) draws attention to the developed philosophical and logical vocabulary of the *Arthashastra,* and the similarities with the grammatical treatises in Kautilya's frequent references to the rule and the exception. He points out that *tantrayukti* sections also occur in the medical treatises as well as in the Tamil grammar, the *Tolkappiyam.*

12. Kautilya specifies that *anvīkṣikī* includes *sāṁkhya, yoga,* and *lokāyata* (*AS* 1.2.10); this indicates that he was using it as an umbrella term including various philosophical schools.

13. *AS* 15.1.1–2.

14. See, for instance, *AS* 1.6.1, where the examples of kings who lost everything because they did not have control over their senses include Duryodhana, Ravana, and Jamadagnya (that is, Parashurama). Elsewhere (*AS* 8.3.43), Nala and Yudhishthira are cited as examples of the dangers of gambling.

15. The oligarchies that are mentioned are the Lichchhavikas, Vrijikas, Mallakas, Madrakas, Kurukas, and Panchalas (*AS* 11.1.4–5).

16. The inclusion of the ally as one of the elements of the state is noteworthy. According to Harmut Scharfe (*Investigations in Kauṭalya's Manual of Political Science* [Wiesbaden: Harrowitz Verlag, 1993], 118), *rājya* is a larger concept than "state" because it includes the ally, and it is narrower because it excludes the king. He also states that the king stands outside, or more precisely, above the *rājya.* Hence, he translates *rājya* as (the king's) rule rather than kingdom or state. However, we should note that while *AS* 8.2.1 does distinguish between the *rājā* and *rājya,* the king is included among the seven elements of the state.

17. *AS* 6.1.1; 8.1.5.

18. André Wink, "Sovereignty and Universal Dominion in South Asia," in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000–1800,* ed. Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103–104.

19. They include *rājan, svāmin, narendra, nṛpa, netṛ,* and *pārthiva.*

20. Other terms include *rājya, janapada, viṣaya,* and *deśa. Deśa* seems to have more general connotations of area or region and is generally used in the context of statements on custom. The term *rāṣṭra* occurs at various places and has a variety of meanings: the countryside; various types of resources of the state, including various kinds of taxes and state income; and also a political unit (kingdom). According to Scharfe (*The State in Indian Tradition,* 121–122), *janapada* means province, not kingdom.

21. *AS* 6.1.8.

22. See Wink, "Sovereignty and Universal Dominion in South Asia," 103. He says this is on the basis of *AS* 8.1.27, which he understands as asserting that "the *janapada* is shared by the enemy." This sentence actually refers to the people of the countryside being potentially partial to the enemy.

23. There are references, for instance, to *sva-deśa* and *para-deśa, sva-viṣaya,* and *para-viṣaya.*

24. *AS* 6.1.8; 2.34.1–4; 2.36.38.

25. In *AS* 5.6.16, *sāmantas* are clubbed with *mukhyas* (principal officers); in the context of what the king should do if either of them rose in revolt, he is advised to entice one or the other with the prospect of kingship and get him killed; or he should get rid of him by using remedies in time of emergency. Similarly, in *AS* 5.6.19–20, one of the options for a king in enemy territory is to place one of the *sāmantas* in his fort and retire.

26. Lallanji Gopal, "Sāmanta: Its Varying Significance in Ancient India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1–2 (April 1963): 23–24. Gopal argues that the term came to refer to a subordinate ruler from the fifth century onward.

27. *AS* 1.5.17 (*ananyāṁ pṛthivīṁ bhuṅkte*).
28. *AS* 9.1.18. A *yojana* is usually taken to correspond to nine miles. This would be a little over nine thousand miles, which is much more than the actual breadth of the subcontinent. Olivelle (*King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India,* 675n.) suggests that this should be understood as a round number, not one that should be taken literally.
29. *AS* 2.11.
30. *AS* 8.2.1.
31. *AS* 2.4.6.
32. *AS* 6.1. The term usually used for the king in the text is *rājan.* The term *vijigīṣu* (one desirous of victory) is used only in the sections on war, conquest, and interstate relations.
33. *AS* 1.5.8.
34. *AS* 1.5.17.
35. *AS* 6.1.17–18.
36. His conduct is described in *AS* 1.7.
37. *AS* 1.17; 1.20.14–21.
38. *AS* 5.4–5.
39. *AS* 7.11.34.
40. *AS* 1.19.
41. For non-standard subjects, see *AS* 3.1. 12–14; 3.6.30. For the various bases of social identity, see *AS* 4.6.2, 4.8.1. Wealth (*sāra*), associates (*sahāya*), and residence (*nivāsa*) are the aspects of a person's identity to be ascertained in the case of criminal proceedings.
42. *AS* 1.19.34.
43. *AS* 4.3.
44. *AS* 2.36.1–4. Gotra is generally associated with Brahmanas.
45. *AS* 2.35.3–5.
46. See Willy Clarysse and Dorothy Thompson, *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
47. *AS* 3.1.41.
48. *AS* 1.3.16.
49. *AS* 3.1.38.
50. *AS* 1.7.9.
51. *AS* 2.1.1.
52. For details, see Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the Twelfth Century* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), 345–347.
53. *AS* 1.4.1.
54. *AS* 9.1.9.
55. *AS* 9.1.13–15.
56. *AS* 7.16.30–32.
57. *AS* 8.4.
58. *AS* 5.2.70.
59. *AS* 8.2.
60. *AS* 8.3.4. Heesterman argues ("Kauṭilya and the Ancient Indian State," 131) that this emphasis on self-control makes the king a worthy counterpart to the ideal Brahmana, and gives him an authority of his own, not one derived from the community.
61. These *vyasanas* are also spoken of in the *Arthashastra* in connection with certain other people. For instance, Kautilya states that drinking and gambling should be prohibited in the army camp and that envoys should avoid women and drink.
62. *AS* 1.17.30–33.
63. However, elsewhere in the text, he indicates that the princely propensity toward *vyasanas* can, on occasion, be taken advantage of. For instance, a disaffected but not incorrigible prince should be led into addiction to women, drinking, or hunting by secret agents, seized, and brought before the king (*AS* 1.18.15).
64. *AS* 8.3.
65. *AS* 8.3.66.
66. *AS* 1.4.3–5; 1.4.16.
67. *AS* 1.4.13.
68. *AS* 1.4.5–16; 1.19.33; 1.5.2.
69. *AS* 3.20.22.

70. Patrick Olivelle, "Kaṇṭakaśodhana. Courts of Criminal Justice," in *Devadattīyam: Johannes Bronkhorst Felicitation Volume,* ed. François Voegeli, Vincent Eltschinger, Dannielle Feller, Maria Piera Cadotti, Bogdan Diaconsescu, and Malhar Kulkarni (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 629–642.
71. *AS* 4.10.17.
72. *AS* 4.13.32.
73. *AS* 4.13.42–43.
74. Patrick Olivelle and Mark McClish, "The Four Feet of Legal Procedure and the Origins of Jurisprudence in Ancient India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 1 (2015): 33–47. Olivelle and McClish point out that a disagreement over the primacy of royal authority is found within the *Arthashastra* itself and is also articulated in Dharmashastra works of later centuries, which did not accept the superiority of the king's edict over Brahmanical Dharmashastra.
75. *AS* 3.1.39.
76. *AS* 3.1. 41; 3.9.14–15; 3.11.39–42; 3.11.50; 4.9.28.
77. *AS* 4.8.
78. *AS* 4.8.21–23; 4.8.25; 4.9.23.
79. *Sāhasa* is explained in *AS* 3.17.1 as the forcible or violent seizure of property in the presence of the victim. It is possible that this crime was adopted as a "standard" on the basis of which various other violent crimes were graded. The scale of fines given in *AS* 3.17.8–10 for the lowest, middle, and highest fines is as follows: 48–96 *paṇa*s, 200–500 *paṇa*s, 500–100 *paṇa*s (*AS* 3.17.8–10) (Olivelle, *King, Governance and Law,* 494–495). Olivelle translates *sāhasa-daṇḍa* as a "seizure fine" but admits that the meaning of this term is not certain.
80. *AS* 1.10.15.
81. Olivelle argues that there are parallels between penance and punishment insofar as the sinner / criminal bears the marks of his moral / criminal transgression on his body. He also connects this with the doctrine of transmigration and the naturalization of the social hierarchy. See Patrick Olivelle, "Penance and Punishment: Marking the Body in Criminal Law and Social Ideology of Ancient India," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011): 23–41.
82. *AS* 4. 11.
83. *AS* 4.11.1–22.
84. *AS* 4.11.
85. Stealing temple property also merits either the highest fine or simple death (*AS* 4.10.16).
86. *AS* 4.13.33.
87. *AS* 4.11.11–12.
88. *AS* 4.10.
89. *AS* 5.2.44, 55.
90. According to Scharfe (*Investigations in Kauṭalya's Manual of Political Science,* 172), ancient India did not know of prison sentences and the purpose of prisons was to detain those convicted criminals who had not paid their fines. This seems partially correct.
91. *AS* 2.5.5.
92. *AS* 4.9.21. According to Olivelle (*King, Governance and Law in Ancient India*, 509 n.), there were three kinds of prisons: *dharmasthīya, mahāmātrīya,* and *bandhanāgāra*.
93. *AS* 2.36.46; 4.9.23–24.
94. *AS* 2.36.44–45, 47.
95. *AS* 3.3.9.
96. *AS*.1.3.13.
97. *AS* 1.7.2.
98. *AS* 1.17.1
99. *AS* 5.3.3–4.
100. *AS* 8.4.25–26; 1.17; 1.20.
101. *AS* 7.17.21; 1.17.52; 7.17.16; 5.6.34; 12.2.25; 12.3.5–9; 5.6.32–36.
102. *AS* 8.1.48.
103. *AS* 9.5; 8.2.2–3; 5.1.4.
104. *AS* 1.13.22.
105. *AS* 7.5.10.
106. *AS* 7.7.9–37.

107. *AS* 7.14.18.
108. *AS* 5.1.4.
109. *AS* 7.15.25. This contradicts the statement elsewhere (*AS* 9.6.2) that force should not be used against the people of the city and countryside.
110. Heesterman ("Kauṭilya and the Ancient Indian State," 138, 140) goes to the other extreme, seeing the king as *primus inter pares* with the officials called the *mahāmātra*s. In his view, the essence of the *Arthashastra* is the diffusion of power and the scattering of resources. Scharfe (*Investigations in Kauṭalya's Manual of Political Science,* 122) sees the Kautilyan state as a decentralized one consisting of several provinces (*janapada*s).
111. *AS* 3.1.41.
112. *AS* 15.1.71.
113. *Manavadharmashastra* is the proper name, and *Manusmriti* the popular one. Although Manu is the putative author of the work, we do not know the names of the actual authors. "Manu" is used in this chapter as a shorthand for the actual authors of the work. The references in this discussion are to Patrick Olivelle's edition of the text titled *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2006). In citations, *Manusmriti* is henceforth abbreviated to *MS*.
114. Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, 25.
115. Olivelle, *King, Law and Governance,* 23–25. According to Olivelle, it seems that chapters 7–9 of the *Manusmriti* used the "Kautilya recension" of the *Arthashastra*.
116. Epithets for the king include *nṛpa, rājan,* and *narādhipa*.
117. *MS* 10.81.
118. *MS* 11.32.
119. *MS* 7.85–86; 10.112.
120. *MS* 7.7. Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law,* 154.
121. *MS* 7.17–18; Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law,* 154–155.
122. *MS* 7.22–25.
123. *MS* 7.140.
124. *MS* 7.28.
125. *MS* 7.141.
126. *MS* 8.1–3, 9.
127. *MS* 8.44, 170–173.
128. *MS* 161.139.
129. *MS* 7.37–226.
130. This is a bit different from Kautilya's sequence: drinking, womanizing, gambling, hunting.
131. *MS* 5.44.
132. *MS* 10.84.
133. *MS* 7.110; Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law,* 160.
134. Siegfried Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit—Pali—Prakrit* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984) (Jan Gonda, gen. ed., *A History of Indian Literature,* vol. 3, fasc.1). For a hypothesis that *kāvya* can be traced to scribes in the royal chancery, see Herman Tieken, "On Beginnings: Introductions and Prefaces in *Kāvya,*" in *Innovations and Turning Points: Toward a History of Kāvya Literature,* ed. Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, and Gary Tubb (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86–108.
135. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, [2006] 2007), 114, 134–137.
136. One of these plays, the *Svapnavasavadatta,* had been found earlier (K. P. A. Menon, *Complete Plays of Bhāsa,* text with English translation and notes, 3 vols. [Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996], 1:ii–iii). For an account of the discovery, see N. P. Unni's introduction to T. Ganapati Sastri, ed., *Bhāsa's Plays (A Critical Study)* (Delhi, Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1985). Sastri's claim that Bhasa was the author of these plays was challenged by some scholars who argued that they may have been adaptations from the works of various ancient dramatists including Bhasa, and not the works of Bhasa alone. References in this section are to K. P. A. Menon, *Complete Plays of Bhāsa,* text with English translation and notes, 3 vols. (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996), hereafter abbreviated to *Bhāsa*. However, translations given are mine.
137. A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature,* vol. 2: *The Origins and Formation of Classical*

Kāvya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1974] 1990), 262.

138. Sten Konow suggested that Bhasa lived in Ujjayini in western India and that Rajasimha may have been the Shaka Kshatrapa king Rudrasimha I (cited in Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature,* 2: 264).

139. The *Balacharita* is based on Krishna's boyhood days in Vrindavana. The five *Mahabharata*-related plays are: *Madhyamavyayoga, Pancharatra, Dutavakya, Dutaghatotkacha, Karnabhara,* and *Urubhanga.* The two *Ramayana*-related plays are *Pratima* and *Abhisheka.* The *Pratignayaugandharayana* and *Svapnavasavadatta* are based on the legendary king Udayana. *Charudatta* (which is incomplete), the only play that is not connected directly with political issues or characters, tells the love story of a poor Brahmana named Charudatta and a courtesan named Vasantasena.

140. Damodara-Krishna is, of course, a great god. Avimaraka is the son of god Agni and a human princess named Sudarshana. This play presents us with the problem of a hero who is a prince with part-divine parentage, who, due to the curse of an angry sage, has been reduced to the position of an outcaste. There are frequent discussions of how his attractive appearance and fearless deeds actually conceal his royal antecedents.

141. *Bhāsa,* 2:120.

142. *Bhāsa,* 3:143.

143. *Bhāsa,* 3:244.

144. *Bhāsa,* 2:17.

145. *Bhāsa,* 2:26.

146. *Bhāsa,* 2:18.

147. *Bhāsa,* 2:157–158.

148. *Bhāsa,* 2:21ff.

149. In the Valmiki *Ramayana* too, Rama says that Kaikeyi should not be blamed because fate determines all; but Bhasa emphasizes her innocence.

150. See the excellent introductions to his works by E. H. Johnston, *The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha,* part 2 (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1936), and Patrick Olivelle, text and trans., *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa* (New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2009). Johnston places Ashvaghosha between circa 50 BCE and 100 CE. Olivelle's date for Ashvaghosha is linked to his dating of the *Manusmriti;* he is convinced that Ashvaghosha knew that text and that it should therefore be placed in the second rather than the first century CE. Hereafter, *Buddhacharita* has been abbreviated to *BC.* Citations are to Olivelle's edition.

151. Olivelle, *The Life of the Buddha,* xxii.

152. See Johnston, *The Buddhacarita,* xliv–lxxix.

153. Hiltebeitel points out (*Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion and Narrative* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 625–684) that although there are no direct references to the major *Mahabharata* characters, Ashvaghosha refers to Vyasa and Krishna. More importantly, he was very familiar with the discussion of *mokṣa-dharma* in the Shanti Parva of the *Mahabharata* and used it as a basis to give a Buddhist rejoinder.

154. *BC* 9.73.

155. *BC* 2.41, 2.6. The term *rajaśāstra* occurs in *BC* 1.41 and *nītiśāstra* in *BC* 4.62.

156. His epithets include *rājan, nṛpa, narapati, bhūmipati,* and *vasudhādhipa.*

157. *BC* 2.40.

158. *BC* 11.57. Olivelle, *The Life of the Buddha,* 319.

159. *BC* 9.40–45.

160. *BC,* 9.40. Olivelle, *The Life of the Buddha,* 259.

161. *BC* 9.41. Olivelle, *The Life of the Buddha,* 261.

162. *BC* 9.43–49.

163. *BC* 11.44–49.

164. Canto 28, Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha,* 431.

165. *Rasa* and *bhāva* are important elements of Sanskrit *kāvya. Rasa* (literally "flavor") refers to the type of aesthetic reaction and enjoyment that the audience of *kāvya* experiences; in the case of a play, these are their reactions to the emotions (*bhāvas*) simulated by the actors.

166. See J. Przyluski, *The Legend of Emperor Aśoka in Indian and Chinese Texts,* trans. from the French with additional notes and comments by Dilip Kumar Biswas (Calcutta: Firma K. L.

Mukhopadhyay, 1967), introduction; and John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 1. In the following discussion, I have used Strong's translation of the text. *Ashokavadana* has hereafter been abbreviated in citations as *AA.* For another publication of the text, see Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya ed., ann., and partly trans., *The Aśokāvadāna: Sanskrit Text Compared with Chinese Versions* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1963).

167. *AA,* 260–264.

168. Strong, *AA,* 211.

169. There is no reference in the Buddhist texts to the Kalinga war that Ashoka's thirteenth rock edict speaks so movingly about.

170. *AA,* 221, 232, 233, 285.

171. B. G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966): 15.

172. Strong, *AA,* 50–54. Other ideas about the *cakravartin* are found in the Lotus Sutra, which talks about a *caturdvīpaka-cakravartin* (a *cakravartin* who rules over the four continents), *bala-cakravartin,* and *maṇḍalin* (who rules over a small region). The four continents are Uttarakuru in the north, Jambudvipa in the south, Purvavideha in the east, and Apara Godaniya in the west.

173. Ashoka had a special relationship with the bodhi tree. He bathed that tree with thousands of jars of fragrant water and made lavish gifts of precious stones. His jealous queen Tishyarakshita's attempt to destroy the tree were luckily thwarted. Ashoka is also said to have visited the stupas of the Buddha's disciples and built many shrines (*caityas*) (*AA,* 219–221, 244–268).

174. *AA,* 135–136.

175. *AA,* 234–238.

176. *AA,* 268.

177. *AA,* 287–292.

178. Strong, *AA,* 291–292. Elsewhere (*AA,* 256), Ashoka speaks of the "vacillating powers of royal sovereignty."

179. Ashoka's son Kunala and his brother Vitashoka join the order. But Ashoka tries to dissuade the latter from doing so.

180. For a discussion of the Jataka tradition, see Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010). On the social discourse of the Jatakas, see Uma Chakravarti, "Women, Men, and Beasts: The Jataka as Popular Tradition," in Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of "Ancient" India* by (New Delhi: Tulika, 2006), 198–221.

181. I have relied for this analysis on the English translation of the Jatakas in C. W. Cowell, gen. ed., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births,* trans. Robert Chalmers, 6 vols. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, [1895–1907] 1990–2001); hereafter abbreviated to Cowell. The references are to the Jataka number, followed by the volume and page number in this series.

182. For cross-cultural perspectives on this larger issue, see Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, eds., *A Communion of Subjects: Animals, Science, and Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). For a discussion of animal analogies and stories in Vedic texts, see Stephanie Jamison, "The Function of Animals in the Rig Veda, RV X.28, and the Origins of Story Literature in India," in *Pense, dire et représenter l'animal dans le monde indien,* ed. N. Balbir and G. J. Pinault (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 197–218. For a discussion of later texts such as the *Panchatantra,* see Patrick Olivelle, "Talking Animals: Explorations in an Indian Literary Genre," *Religions of South Asia* 7 (2013): 14–26.

183. See Chakravarti, "Women, Men and Beasts."

184. Jataka no. 270, Cowell, 2:242–243. Reference to this event also occurs in the early part of the Nachcha Jataka (No. 32).

185. Gokahale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," 17.

186. According to Kumkum Roy ("Justice in the *Jātakas,*" in Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010], 290–310), the Jatakas reflect two distinct but interrelated ideas of justice: that which regulates the relationship between the rulers and ruled; and that which regulates relations among the ruled.

187. Jataka no. 151, Cowell, 2:1–4.
188. Jataka no. 50, Cowell, 1:126–28. This seems to be the same as king Nami of the Jaina tradition, who attained enlightenment while still a king and renounced the world.
189. Jataka no. 521, Cowell, 6:59–64.
190. Jataka no. 9, Cowell, 1:30–32.
191. Jataka no. 258, Cowell, 3:216–218.
192. Jataka no. 514, Cowell, 5:20–31.
193. Jataka no. 514, Cowell, 5:29.
194. Jataka no. 499, Cowell, 4:250–256.
195. Jataka no. 499, based on Cowell, 4:254.
196. See, for instance, Ratan Parimoo, "On Re-identification of Āndhra Buddhist Jātaka Relief Sculptures," *Artibus Asiae* 55, nos. 1–2 (1995): 125–154; Monika Zin, "When Stones Are All that Survived: The Case of Buddhism in Andhra," in *Oriental Studies—Past and Present,* ed. Agata Bareja-Starzynska and Marek Mejor, Proceedings of the International Conference of Oriental Studies, Warsaw 2010, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 65, 1 (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2012), 236–253.
197. See Robert L. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia,* ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 64–109; Ratan Parimoo, "Adaptation of Folk Tales for Buddhist Jataka Stories and Their Depiction in Indian Art—A Study in Narrative and Semiotic Transformation," *Journal of the M.S. University of Baroda,* Humanities Number (1990–1991): 23–24.
198. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men,* 135.
199. K. P. Jayaswal, "The Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela," *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929–30): 71–89.
200. Ibid., lines 16–17. The meaning of the phrase translated by Jayaswal as "one whose empire is protected by the chief of the empire (himself)" is not clear.
201. R. D. Banerji, "Inscriptions in the Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves," *Epigraphia Indica* 13 (1915–1916): 158–160.
202. F. Kielhorn, "Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman, the Year 72," *Epigraphia Indica* 8 (1905–1906): 36–49. Remains of an ancient embankment were discovered at Junagadh by A. Jamsedjee ("The Sudarshana or Lake Beautiful of the Girnar Inscriptions, B.C. 300–A.D. 450," with an introduction by O. Codrington, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18 [1890–1894]: 47–50).
203. See Vidya Dehejia, "The Very Idea of a Portrait," *Ars Orientalis* 28 (1998): 40–48. There are representations of royalty in the Chola, Vijayanagara, and Nayaka periods, but these are much later.
204. For Amaravati, see Robert Knox, *Amaravati Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stupa* (London: British Museum, 1992), 122, 178. There is a sculptural relief of this scene in the Musée Guimet. For Nagarjunakonda, see Elizabeth Rosen, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1994), 38, 72; pls. 198, 202.
205. Monika Zin, "Māndhātar, the Universal Monarch, and the Meaning of Representations of the Cakravartin in the Amaravati School, and of the Kings on the Kanaganahalli Stūpa," in *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond,* ed. Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel (Bangkok, Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 149–164. Zin points out that the Mandhata Jataka is the most frequently depicted narrative in the Amaravati school.
206. John Marshall and Alfred Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi,* 3 vols. (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, [1940] 1983), 1:215–216; vol. 2, pl. 11.
207. Ibid., vol. 2, pl. 18.
208. Ibid., vol. 3, pl. 79, no. 27b.
209. K. P. Poonacha, *Excavations at Kanaganahalli (Sannati), Taluk Chitapur, Dist. Gulbarga, Karnataka* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2011).
210. Ibid., 410, pl. CIV-A.
211. Ibid., 411, pl. CV-B.
212. Ibid., 295.
213. Ibid., 366, pl. LX A; 302 and pl. CXIA; 417, pl. CXI; 418, pl. CXII; 166, fig. 48b; 415, pl. CIXA; 416, pl. CX.
214. Zin suggests that "non-Buddhist" kings are represented here because they were

considered auspicious bestowers and protectors of wealth, and were associated with people's welfare (Zin, "Māndhātar," 160–161). Thinking in terms of Buddhist and non-Buddhist kings may not be the best way to look at the evidence.

215. V. V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas* (Bombay: Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981), part 2, 5–18.

216. See Sushil Chandra De, "Khāravela in Sculpture," *Orissa Historical Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (1962): 36–40.

217. Indo-Greek gallery, Coinindia.com.

218. B. N. Mukherjee, "Artistry and Realism: Coinage of the Indo-Greeks and Scytho-Parthians," in Of *Kings and Coins,* ed. Martha L. Carter, (*Marg* 45, no. 4 [1994]: 19–28).

219. The epithets that occur frequently in Kushana inscriptions are *mahārāja* (great king), *devaputra* (son of the god / s), and *rājātirāja* (king of kings), along with *śāhī* (lord).

220. Martha L. Carter, "Coins and Kingship: Kanishka and the Kushana Dynasty," in *Of Kings and Coins,* ed. Martha L. Carter (*Marg* 45, no. 4 [1994]:, 29–38).

221. J. P. Vogel, "Explorations at Mathurā," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* (1911–1912): 120–123.

222. Gerard Fussman, "The Māṭ Devakula: A New Approach to Its Understanding," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage,* ed. Doris M. Srinivasan (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 193–199.

223. B. N. Mukherjee, *The Great Kushana Testament, Indian Museum Bulletin* 30 (Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1995).

224. John M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 184.

225. The legend reads *mahārājā rājātirājā devaputro Kāṇiṣko.* For a detailed description of the two images, see Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans,* chap. 7.

226. For these images, see Osmund Boppearachchi, *From Bactria to Taprobane: Selected Works of Osmund Bopearachchi,* vol. 2: *Art History and Maritime Trade* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2015), 110–161, especially 136, 146.

227. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas,* part 2, 41–49.

228. On the importance of the household in Indian history, see Kumkum Roy, ed., *Looking Within, Looking Without: Exploring Households in the Subcontinent through Time (Essays in Memory of Nandita Prasad Sahai)* (New Delhi: Primus, 2015).

229. Harry Falk, "The Pātagaṇḍigūḍem Copper-Plate Grant of the Ikṣvāku King Ehavala Cāntamūla," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 6 (2004): 275–283.

230. For details of these and other accounts of persecution, See K. T. S. Sarao, *The Decline of Buddhism in India: A Fresh Perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2012), chap. 5.

231. Early versions of the story are given in the *Divyavadana* and the *Ashokavadana* and are echoed in several later texts. See Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka,* 293–294; Sarao, *The Decline of Buddhism in India,* 97–108.

232. Marshall and Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī,* 1:23.

233. Assertions to the contrary are often based on generalizations about the "Hindu" or "Indian" idea of the state based on a few selected texts, and on comparisons between ancient India and medieval and early modern Europe. See, for instance Torkel Brekke, "The Ethics of War and the Concept of War in India and Europe," *NUMEN* 52 (2005): 72–86. The idea of ancient Indian "ritual kingship," still favored by many scholars, also mistakes the rhetoric of the institution of kingship as expressed in a few sources for its historical reality.

1. See Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual: Temples and the Establishment of the Gods* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10–78, for a discussion of Udayagiri as a center of imperial ritual under the Guptas and for an interesting, if somewhat imaginative, hypothesis of the kind of royal religious ritual that may have been performed here.

2. The exploits of the Gupta kings, especially Chandragupta II, became the nucleus of a cycle of legends about a great king named Vikramaditya, which circulated well into medieval times. See D. C. Sircar, *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969).

3. For a series of perceptive essays on Vakataka kingship, see Hans T. Bakker, "Memorials, Temple, Gods and Kings: An Attempt to Unravel the Symbolic Texture of Vākāṭaka Kingship," in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia,* ed. A. W. van den Hoek, D. H. A. Kolff, and M. S. Oort (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 7–19; Bakker, "Royal Patronage and Religious Tolerance: The Formative Period of Gupta-Vākāṭaka Culture," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (3rd series) 20, no. 4 (2010): 461–475; Bakker, "Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha," in *Interrogating Political Systems. Integrative Processes and States in Pre-Modern India,* ed. B. P. Sahu and Hermann Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 2015), 277–300.

4. For the details of the site of Mansar, see http://mansar.eldoc.ub.rug.nl. Earlier, Panaur village (Wardha district, Maharashtra) was considered as the site of Pravarapura.

5. A. M. Hocart's idea of "incorporative kingship' (*Kings and Councillors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970]) is useful to understand this phenomenon.

6. For a discussion of this debate, see Upinder Singh, *Rethinking Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), introduction.

7. For the details of political history and other aspects of this period, see Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the Twelfth Century* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), chap. 8.

8. Hans T. Bakker, *The Vākāṭakas: An Essay in Hindi Iconology* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), 13, 25–28.

9. For the political processes in Orissa, see Upinder Singh, *Kings, Brāhmaṇas and Temples in Orissa, AD 300–1147* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994).

10. For a general discussion of how political imagery was incorporated into ancient Indian religious art, see Heinrich von Stietencron, "Political Aspects of Indian Religious Art," in his *Hindu Myth, Hindu History: Religion, Art, and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 7–28.

11. The exception is the Basim grant of Vindhyashakti II, where the genealogical introduction is in Sanskrit and the rest in Prakrit. For the Vakataka inscriptions, see V. V. Mirashi, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 5 (Ootacamund: Archaeological Survey of India, 1963). *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* is hereafter abbreviated to *CII.*

12. The seven Soma sacrifices are named: *agniṣṭoma, aptoryāma, vājapeya, jyotiṣṭoma, bṛhaspatisava,* and *sādyaskra.*

13. Mirashi, *CII* 5, verse 17.

14. Other near contemporary dynasties that claimed epic connections through their names are the Nalas and Panduvamshis who ruled in eastern Madhya Pradesh.

15. Mirashi, *CII* 5, lx–lxii.

16. Hans T. Bakker, Mansar, http://mansar.eldoc.ub.rug.nl, introduction.

17. Ibid., 12–14.

18. See Mirashi, *CII,* 5, 63–68.

19. B. Chhabra and G. S. Gai, eds., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 3 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981), 312–317. The title of the text is hereafter abbreviated in citations to *CII* 3.

20. See Ellen M. Raven, "Invention and Innovation: Royal Gupta Gold Coins," in *Of Kings and Coins, Marg* 55, no. 4 (1994): 39–56. Barbara Stoller Miller, "A Dynasty of Patrons: The Representation of Gupta Royalty in Coins and Literature," in *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture,* ed. Barbara Stoller Miller (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54–64.

21. Skandagupta gallery, www.coinindia.com.

22. Kumaragupta also boasted of being "lord of the great *aśvamedha*" (*śreyaśvamedha-mahendra*). It is difficult to accept the suggestion made by Willis (*The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual,* 183) that the circulation of the *aśvamedha* coins mimicked the sacrificial horse's wanderings and can be seen as an attempt to expand the geographic reach of the horse and the king's territorial claims by proxy.

23. The fact that Pushyamitra Shunga and the Vakataka Pravarasena I had already performed this great sacrifice was not really important for the composers of the *praśastis*, who frequently indulged in selective amnesia.

24. Raven, "Invention and Innovation," 48–49.

25. Chhabra and Gai, *CII* 3, 203–220.

26. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, [2006] 2007), 240.

27. The text of minor pillar edict 1 indicates that the pillar was initially located in Kaushambi. We are not sure when it was moved to Allahabad.

28. See Gai and Chhabra, *CII* 3, pp. 148–63.

29. While I have used the text given in Gai and Chhabra, *CII,* vol. 3, and though I have benefited from their translations, the translations given here are mine.

30. Allahabad pillar inscription, line 31.

31. Samudragupta's musical accomplishments are also proclaimed on one of his coin types, which shows him playing the stringed *vinā*.

32. Allahabad pillar inscription, verse 8.

33. Allahabad pillar inscription, verse 9. For the earlier references, see verses 3 and 8 and lines 23–26.

34. Bhaskar Anand Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 9. Willis has suggested (*The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual,* pp. 62–63) that the *Nitisara* was written during the reign of the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II (c. 375–415 CE). But his hypothesis that the "Deva" mentioned in the first verse of the *Nitisara* is none other than Chandragupta II, on the grounds that the latter is referred to as "Deva" or "Devagupta" in inscriptions, seems weak. So does his assertion that since Kamandaka describes himself as a disciple of Vishnugupta, alias Kautilya, a generation, or thirty to forty years, must separate the two political theorists.

35. The author's name has been read as Kamandaki by some scholars. The text used in this chapter is Rajendralala Mitra, ed., *The Nītisāra, or The Elements of Polity by Kāmandaki,* revised with English translation by Sisir Kumar Mitra (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, [1861] 1982), Bibliotheca Indica series, no. 179. This uses an anonymous commentary called the *Upadhyayanirapeksha.* Although I have drawn on this edition, translations given are mine. The citations to the text refer to the *sarga* and verse numbers, leaving out the *prakaraṇa. Nitisara* is hereafter abbreviated to *NS.*

36. For a detailed discussion of the political ideas of the *Nitisara,* see Upinder Singh, "Politics, Violence, and War in Kāmandaka's *Nītisāra,*" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 1 (2010): 29–62.

37. There is mention of the Manavas, Indra, Maya, Brihaspati, Ushanas, Vishugupta, Puloma, Shukra, Vishalaksha, Parashara, and Bharadvaja. While some of the schools and thinkers cited were clearly historical, the god Indra and the demon Maya fall within the category of fictive authorities.

38. *NS* 2.6; *NS* 11.42.

39. According to some scholars, the reference is to the god Vishnu, but the verse seems to refer to a generic king.

40. *NS* 2.9. Kautilya gives primacy to philosophy.

41. The epithets include *nṛpa, pārthiva, mahipati, pṛthvīpati, mahibhuja, bhūpati, kṣitibhuja, narapati, nareśvara,* and *maṇḍalādhipa.* The range of epithets is wider than that of the *Arthashastra.*

42. *NS* 14.12.

43. *NS* 4.1.

44. *NS* 8.5.

45. *NS* 5.8.

46. *NS* 5.50. The text makes a distinction between servants (denoted by *bhṛtya* and *sevaka*) and dependants / courtiers of a higher sociopolitical standing (denoted by *anujīvin*). High

ranking officers include the *purohita, senāpati, amātyas*, *mantrīs*, *sacivas*, *adhyakṣas*, *dūtas*, and *mahāmātras*.

47. Daud Ali (*Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* [New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2006]) has very effectively demonstrated the coincidence of the terminology of emotions and political dispositions in various courtly literature of the first millennium.

48. *NS* 5.82.

49. *NS* 16.44.

50. *NS* 7.10; *NS* 7.11.

51. *NS* 7.41–50.

52. *NS* 13.42–43 suggests that spies pretending to be idiots, dumb, blind, and deaf persons, eunuchs, hunters, dwarfs and hunchbacks, petty craftsmen, monks / mendicants, minstrels, slave women, garland-makers, and artists should keep a watch over members of the harem.

53. *NS* 7.41.

54. *NS* 9.13.

55. *NS* 16.19–21.

56. *AS* 9.5 has a more general discussion of troubles emanating from the interior and the outer regions.

57. *NS* 15.23.

58. *NS* 1.14.

59. *NS* 12.25.

60. *NS* 2.40.

61. *NS* 6.10–13.

62. *NS* 6.5.

63. *NS* 15.12.

64. *NS* 15.16.

65. *NS* 2.32.

66. *NS* 14.51.

67. *NS* 1.70; 4.4; 4.15–19.

68. *NS* 2.11.

69. *NS* 4.78.

70. According to some scholars, the *Ritusamhara* is not a work by Kalidasa.

71. The hero of the drama *Vikramorvashiya* is called Vikrama, and Vikramaditya was an epithet of Chandragupta II. An allusion to king Kumaragupta has been seen in the title and content of the *Kumarasambhava*.

72. For the text and translation of the *Abhijnanashakuntala,* see C. R. Devadhar, *Works of Kālidāsa,* vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, [1966] 2005). Hereafter, the title of the text has been abbreviated to *Abhi*.

73. Romila Thapar, *Śakuntalā: Texts, Readings, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

74. *Abhi.,* 5.25.

75. *Abhi.,* 7.33.

76. The published sources of the text used for this study are C. R. Devadhar, ed. and trans., *Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1985] 2005); supplemented by the *Raghuvaṁśa-mahākāvya* with Mallinātha's commentary, and *vyākhyā* and Hindi translation by Acharya Dharadatta Mishra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1974] 2004). Generic references are to Devadhar's edition, but translations given are mine. The title of the text is hereafter abbreviated in citations to *RV*. For a detailed discussion of political ideas in the *Raghuvamsha,* see my essay, "The Power of a Poet: Kingship, Empire and War in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśa,*" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 177–198. It has been suggested that the last two cantos of the *Raghuvamsha* are spurious because going by Sanskrit *kāvya* convention, Kalidasa could not possibly have intended his work to end on such a pessimistic note. However, poets did sometimes transgress conventions, and, as will be argued later in this chapter, the ending of the work has a certain logic.

77. See Manmohan Chakravarti, "Letter," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (January 1903): 185–186; Daniel H. H. Ingalls, "Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96, no. 1 (1976): 16; Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kalidasa,* trans. Edwin Gerow, David Gitomer, and

Barbara Stoller Miller (Delhi: Motilal Banaridass [1984] 1999), 10–12; Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men,* 240–244.

78. See Upinder Singh, "Portraits of Power: Samudragupta and Raghu," Thirty-first K. P. Jayaswal Memorial lecture, November 27, 2016 (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 2017).

79. Kalidasa may have also used Puranic traditions, which were still in a fluid state. However, we should note that the genealogy of the *Raghuvamsha* does not correspond exactly either to that of the *Ramayana* or to that of the Pauranas.

80. Herman Tieken ("The Structure of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśa,*" in *Studien sur Indologies und Iranistik,* ed. Georg Buddruss, Oskar von Hinüber, Hanns-Peter Schmidt, Albrecht Wezler, and Michael Witzel [Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1989], 151–158) points out that the highly suggestive, prophetic ending of the *Raghuvamsha* is similar to that of the *Kumarasambhava.*

81. The word *saṁnyāsa* does not occur, but the terms *yati* and *muni* do.

82. *RV* 1.5.

83. These include titles such as *samrāṭ* (emperor) and *jagadekanātha* (the sole lord of the world). It may be noted that the titles that became the standard markers of sovereignty in inscriptions from the Gupta period onward—*mahārājādhirāja, paramabhaṭṭāraka,* and *parameśvara*—do not occur in the *Raghuvamsha.*

84. *RV* 2.53.

85. *RV* 4.8.

86. *RV* 1.24.

87. *RV* 17.19–20.

88. *RV* 1.26.

89. *RV* 1.8.

90. *RV* 3.70.

91. In one place (*RV* 5.28), Raghu is described as desiring to conquer by force the lord of Kailasha (Kubera) as though he was a *sāmanta.* In another (*RV* 6.33), the crest-jewels of the *sāmanta*s of the king of Avanti are described as obscured by the dust raised by his horses.

92. *RV* 19.6.

93. The disease—*rāja-yakṣma,* generally understood as consumption—is described as having been caused by his excessive addiction to the pleasures of love (*RV* 19.48).

94. *RV* 18.41.

95. According to Ingalls ("Kālidāsa and the Attitudes of the Golden Age," 22–23), Kālidāsa offers two solutions to the larger problem of how a person could face the harsh realities of life while maintaining a vision of permanent goodness and beauty: One was the contemplative life of the *āśrama;* the other was personal devotion to a god, in the poet's case, the god Shiva.

96. The text used for this discussion is R. S. Walimbe, *Viśākhadatta: Mudrārākṣasa* (Poona: Royal Book Stall, 1948). In citations, the text is hereafter abbreviated to *MR.* Translations given are mine. Also see Michael Coulson, ed. and trans., *Rākṣasa's Ring by Viśākhadatta* (New York: New York University Press, JJC Foundation, 2005).

97. As is the case with many other ancient Indian texts, the date of the *Mudrarakshasa* is a matter of debate. In certain manuscripts of the play, in the last verse, instead of Chandragupta, there is reference to a king named Avantivarman.

98. Willis, *The Archaeology of Ritual,* 63.

99. The similarity between the name of the last Nanda king Sarvarthasiddhi and the name Sarvarthasiddha given to Siddhartha in the *Buddhacharita* is interesting.

100. The term *sarvabhauma* occurs in *MR,* act 3, scene 3.

101. In one place, Rakshasa makes a positive reference to king Shibi who has even excelled the conduct of the Buddhas (*MR,* 199).

102. *MR* act 1, v. 7.

103. Chandragupta's connection with the Nandas is alluded to several times in the play and seems connected to the Puranic story of Chandragupta being the eldest son of the last Nanda king Sarvarthasiddhi by Mura, daughter of a *vṛṣala* (hunter). This tradition is recounted by Dhundiraja, a commentator on the *Vishnu Purana.*

104. *MR,* act 3, v. 23.

105. *MR,* act 3, l. 58.

106. *MR,* act 2, scene 1, ll. 45–47; act 6, scene 2, l. 177.

107. *MR,* act 1, v.16.
108. *MR,* act 3, v. 14.
109. *MR,* act 3, v. 16.
110. *MR,* 139.
111. *MR,* act 5, scene 3, v. 12, 155.
112. *MR,* act 7, v. 1–2.
113. Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xii. In the following discussion, I have consulted both Franklin Edgerton's *The Panchatantra Reconstructed,* vol. 1, *Text and Critical Apparatus* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1924), as well as Olivelle's translation. Olivelle's translated edition has been abbreviated to *PT* in subsequent citations.
114. See Olivelle, "Talking Animals: Explorations in an Indian Literary Genre," *Religions of South Asia* 7 (2013): 14–26. Olivelle argues that the *Panchatantra*'s position is that nature is stronger than nurture.
115. See *PT,* 27–28, 47, 118, 119, 134–135. Interestingly, the *Mahabharata* references occur in the context of using one's wits and disguise, as the Pandavas did while they lived incognito in the Matsya court. The references to Rama, Dasharatha, the Pandavas, and other legendary kings occur in the context of kings facing difficulties and, ultimately, death.
116. Olivelle, *PT,* 26, verse 59. These correspond to the four vices arising from lust and anger in the *Arthashastra,* although the sequence is different. Of the four chief vices, Kautilya's list in order of increasing reprehensibility is: hunting, gambling, womanizing, and drinking. Manu's is hunting, womanizing, gambling, and drinking.
117. *PT,* 143.
118. *PT,* 7, verses 4, 5.
119. *PT,* 126, verse 64.
120. *PT,* 70, verse 177.
121. Olivelle, *PT,* 55, verse 129
122. Olivelle, *PT,* 41–42, verse 97.
123. *PT,* 33, verse 69.
124. For instance, *PT,* bk. 1, stories 5, 6, 7.
125. *PT,* 118–120.
126. Olivelle, *PT,* 148, verse 7.
127. There is only one positively portrayed, sensible woman in the *Panchatantra*—the wife of the foolish Brahmana in Book 5. All the other women are depicted as wanton and faithless.
128. *PT,* 112–113.
129. *PT,* 129–130.
130. *PT,* 62–70.
131. *PT,* 120, verse 51. Critiquing animal sacrifice, the wicked cat Dadhikarna, who is pretending to be a pious ascetic and an expert in Dharmashastra, states that there has never been, nor will there ever be, a dharma greater than *ahiṁsā.*
132. *PT,* 56, verses 132, 135.
133. *PT,* 98–100, bk. 2, story 2.
134. *Nitishataka,* v. 47, in M. R. Kale, *The Nīti and Vairāgya Śatakas of Bhartṛhari* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1971] 2004), translation mine.
135. See M. Ramakrishna Bhat, *Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṁhitā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981).
136. Ibid., 63.
137. On the evils of the Kali age, see P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstr*a, 3rd ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, [1946] 1993), 3:891–895.
138. "In India the divinity of kings, however small their domain, has always been accepted by the masses" (Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969], 1). Gonda is not alone in holding such a view.
139. Atreyi Biswas, *The Political History of the Hūṇas in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), 65.
140. The principal evidence cited is that of four three-barbed arrowheads and two seals: One monastic seal was counterstruck with letters reading "To-ra-ma-ṇa," and the other had the legend "Huṇa-rāja" (G. R. Sharma, *The Excavations at Kauśāmbī [1957–59],* [Allahabad: Allahabad University Publications, 1960], 14–16).

141. See John Marshall, "Structural Remains," in *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations Carried Out at Taxila Under the Orders of the Government of India between the Years 1913 and 1934* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1951], 1975), vol. 1; Report on the Human Remains from the Dharmarājikā by B. S. Guha (296–314) and 284–85; vol. 2, 547–548. Ahmad Hasan Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila* (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1999), 75–78, 129–130, has questioned Marshall's interpretation of the evidence and suggests that the presence of Gupta gold coins at Taxila could point to "Indian intrusion." Considering Chandragupta II's grant to the Sanchi establishment, this seems a rather far-fetched idea. Coins of the White Huns have been found at Taxila.

142. Marshall, *Taxila,* 548–549. These were found in some of the monastic courts. Marshall suggested that the ones with triangular blades and double tang may have been used by the defending monks, and the three-bladed ones with plain tang may have been part of the weaponry used by the White Huns.

143. Cited by Upendra Thakur, *The Hūṇas in India* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1967), 151, 176.

144. This evident from a Nalanda inscription, which refers to Baladitya having built a magnificent temple in this place (Hirananda Sastri, "Nalanda Stone Inscription of the Reign of Yasovarmmadeva," *Epigraphia Indica* 20 [1929–1930]: 37–46).

145. Thakur, *The Hūṇas in India,* 142–143.

146. See Singh, *Kings, Brāhmaṇas and Temples in Orissa,* 116–122, 287–288.

1. See Shereen Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology: Early State Perspectives* (New Delhi: Primus, 2016), 60–61.

2. On these aspects, see, for instance, Gustav Oppert, *On the Weapons, Army Organization, and Political Maxims of the Ancient Hindus, with Special Reference to Gunpowder and Firearms* (Ahmedabad: New Order Books, [1880] 1967); P. C. Chakravarti, *The Art of War in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, [1941] 1989); V. R. R. Dikshitar, *War in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1948] 1987); Bimal Kanti Majumdar, *The Military System in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, [1955] 1960); G. N. Pant, *Indian Archery* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, [1978] 1993); Major-General Gurcharan Singh Sandhu, *A Military History of Ancient India* (Delhi: Vision Books, 2000); Uma Prasad Thaplyal, *Warfare in Ancient India: Organizational and Operational Dimensions* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010); Indra, *Ideologies of War and Peace in Ancient India* (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Institut Publications, 1957); S. N. Prasad, ed., *Historical Perspectives of Warfare in India: Some Morale and Materiel* (sic) *Determinants* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000); Thomas R. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, in association with Ashoka University, 2015).

3. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings,* 112.

4. Thaplyal, *Warfare in Ancient India,* 278, 282.

5. See Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate (A Study of Military Supplies)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1971] 2005); Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff, eds., *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000–1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

6. Trautmann, "Elephants and the Mauryas," in *India's Environmental History: From Ancient Times to the Colonial Period,* ed. Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), 158–159.

7. These details are based on Thaplyal, *Warfare in Ancient India,* chap. 6.

8. Ibid., 194–218, 231–253; Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings,* 131–138.

9. *Kalpa Sutra*;Hermann Jacobi, trans., *Jaina Sūtras,* part 1, *Sacred Books of the East,* ed. Max Muller (New York: Dover, [1884] 1968), 22: 224–225.

10. Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṁyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 133.

11. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, [1979] 1979), 170–171.

12. *Uttaradhyayana Sutra*; Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras,* part 2, 11.

13. *Acharanga Sutra*; Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras,* part 1, 61.

14. *Acharanga Sutra*; Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras,* part 1, 7–16.

15. These include charcoal, timber, bullock carts, animal byproducts, lac, alchohol, livestock, poisons, weapons, and slaves (Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification,* 172).

16. *Acharanga Sutra*; Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras,* part 1, 18.

17. Paul Dundas, "The Non-Violence of Violence: Jain Perspectives on Warfare, Asceticism and Worship," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice,* ed. John R. Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), 47–48.

18. Ibid., 49.

19. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification,* 313–314 and n. 62.

20. The reference to Vena is intriguing as, in the Brahmanical tradition, Vena is the bad king, who paves the way for the good king Prithu. However, a clue is provided in the *Padma Purana,* which states that Vena started out as a good ruler but became a Jaina.

21. For identifications of some of the rulers and places mentioned in the inscription, see K. P. Jayaswal, "The Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela," *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929–1930): 80–86.

22. See Robert J. Zydenbos, "Jainism as the Religion of Non-Violence," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History,* ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Boston: Brill, 1999), 188–191.

23. Rupert Gethin, "Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis

of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 171–174. Also see Rupert Gethin, "Buddhist Monks, Buddhist Kings, Buddhist Violence: On the Early Buddhist Attitudes to Violence," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice,* ed. John R. Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), 62–82.

24. E. M. Hare, trans., *The Book of the Gradual Sayings, Anguttara Nikaya or More Numbered Suttas* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, [1934] 2001), 3: 116–117.

25. Ibid., 54–55.

26. Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṁghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 102, 105, 107.

27. Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses,* 325.

28. Bodhi (ibid., 492–493, n.) points out that this incident is narrated in a different context in the *Dhammapada-atthakatha* and Jatakas 31 and 203.

29. *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra,* cited by Gethin, "Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion?," 189. Also see *Bodhisattvabhumi* 113, 24, cited by Lambert L. Schmithausen, "Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude Towards War," in *Violence Denied,* ed. Houben and van Kooij, 59. According to Gethin, the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* story may represent a deliberate challenge to mainstream Buddhist ethics; in the *Abhidhamma* and the commentaries on the *Tipitaka,* killing a living being can never really be considered or justified as an act of compassion.

30. *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa,* cited in Paul Demiéville, "Buddhism and War," trans. Michelle Kendall, in *Buddhist Warfare,* ed. Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.

31. Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses,* 177.

32. Ibid., 178.

33. Ibid., *The Connected Discourses,* 1335.

34. Mugapakkha Jataka; *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births,* ed. C. W. Cowell, trans. Robert Chalmers (Delhi: Low Price Publications, [1895–1907] 1990–2001), vol. 6: 1–19; no. 538.

35. Mahasilava Jataka, ibid., 1:128–133, no. 51.

36. Seyya Jataka, ibid., 2:273, no. 282.

37. Bhojajaniya Jataka, ibid., 1:61–63, no. 23.

38. Samgamavachara Jataka, ibid., 2:63–65, no. 182.

39. Maha Ummagga Jataka, ibid.,6:157–246, no. 546.

40. Mahaparinibbana Sutta; Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, [1987] 1995), 275–277.

41. John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 116–120.

42. John Marshall and Alfred Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, [1940] 1983), vol. 2, pl. 15, 3; 1: 117–118. On the back of the Western Gateway middle section (pl. 61, 2), there is an artistically superior telling of the story, though marked by less action.

43. Patrick Olivelle, text and trans., *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa* (New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2009), Canto 13.

44. See John Marshall and Alfred Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi,* 3 vols. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, [1940] 1983, vol. 2, pls. 29, 2; 61, 3; 62, 3.

45. For instance, the war of the relics is depicted in Cave 10; Mara appears in paintings in Cave 1 and 26.

46. For a discussion of the place of Buddha relics in the life cycles of South Asian polities, see Anne M. Blackburn, "Buddha Relics in the Lives of Southern Asian Polities," *NUMEN* 57 (2010): 317–340.

47. Michael Jerryson, in *Buddhist Warfare,* ed. Jerryson and Juergensmeyer, 8.

48. See P. A. Brunt, trans., *Arrian: History of Alexander and Indica II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and William Heineman, 1983); and Duane W. Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," in *Brill's New Jacoby,* ed. Ian Worthington, Brill Online, 2012, www.brillonline.nl, 15.

49. Arrian, *Indika* 5.3 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 2).

50. Diodoros, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.37.3 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 8, 9).

51. H. H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World: Aspects of Greek and Roman*

Life (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 73.

52. On the reported encounter between Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus, see B. N. Mukherjee's commentary to R. C. Raychaudhuri's *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [1923] 2000), 593–595.

53. On the importance of elephants in the Seleucid army, see Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings,* 233–237.

54. Arrian, *Indika* 9.12 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 27). The term *dikaioteta* has been translated as "justice," but is in this context better understood as "laws."

55. Diodoros, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.41.2 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 12).

56. Strabo, *Geographica* 15.1. 46 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 32).

57. Ibid., 15.1.52 (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 45).

58. Diodoros, *Bibliotheca Historica* (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 9).

59. Arrian, *Indika* (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 30).

60. Strabo, *Geographica* 15.1.53, citing Megasthenes (Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 46).

61. Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press [1961] 2012), 168.

62. Rock edict 3, lines 1–2.

63. Rock edict 13, lines 3–5.

64. *Aṭavi* means forest, but here it is used in the sense of *āṭavikāḥ,* which, in the *Arthashastra,* refers to forest people and forest chieftains.

65. There is a striking similarity between this sentiment and the statement addressed to the unconquered borderers in separate rock edict 2, where the king states that he will forgive what can be forgiven.

66. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Antiyoka is identified with Antiochus II Theos of Syria; Turamaya with Ptolemy II Philadelphos of Egypt; Antikini with Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia; Maka with Magas of Cyrene in north Africa; and Alikasudara with Alexander of Epirus or Alexander of Corinth. The identification of some of the other terms is problematic. However, the Yonas and Kambojas can definitely be placed in the northwest; and the Bhojas, Andhras, and Pulindas can be located in trans-Vindhyan India.

67. Rock edict 13, lines 10–11.

68. Rock edict 13, line 11.

69. *The Cyrus Cylinder 12 September–12 January 2011,* National Museum of Iran Catalogue (National Museum of Iran, n.d.).

70. Robin D. S. Yates, "Making War and Making Peace in early China," in *War and Peace in the Ancient World,* ed. Kurt Raaflaub (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 49.

71. In citations, *Mahabharata* has been abbreviated to *Mbh*. Generic references are to the critical edition of the *Mahabharata*, V. S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya, gen. eds., *The Mahābhārata, for the First Time Critically Edited,* 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966), a digital version of which has been made available by John D. Smith and Muneo Tokunaga. Specific editions and page numbers are cited in the case of the use of translations.

72. *Mbh.* 5.60.

73. *Mbh.* 12.95.1; 12.107.27.

74. *Mbh.* 12.95.1.

75. *Mbh.* 5.37.60.

76. *Mbh.* 5.93; 5.122.

77. *Mbh.* 5. 126.48; John D. Smith, *The Mahābhārata: An Abridged Translation* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2009), 330.

78. *Mbh.* 12.60.15, 17.

79. James L. Fitzgerald, trans., *Mahābhārata,* vol. 7, *The Book of the Women; The Book of Peace,* part 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 12.7.5–9, 180.

80. The fact that the word *yuddha* is used for both duels and war does not mean that no conceptual distinction was made between the two (Torkel Brekke, "The Ethics of War and the Concept of War in India and Europe," *NUMEN* 52 [2005]: 74). It is not just the word but the context of its usage that is important.

81. On the operational aspects of war, see especially *Mbh.* 12. 96–104.

82. This is described at the end of the Drona Parva. J. L. Mehta ("The Discourse of Violence

in the Mahabharata," in *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* [New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research and Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990], 270) comments that we have here reference to the power of nonresistance or nonviolent resistance.

83. *Mbh.* 6.55.121–125; Smith, *The Mahābhārata,* 377.

84. *Mbh.* 7.20–30.

85. *Mbh.* 7.48.22–23; Smith, *The Mahābhārata,* 429.

86. On this episode, see Torkel Brekke, "Breaking the Thigh and the Warrior Code," in *Warfare, Religion, and Society in Indian History,* ed. Raziuddin Aquil and Kaushik Roy (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 43–61. Brekke argues that this episode contains a major, long, and detailed argument between a deontological and consequentialist view of war, that is, between a view that the honor code must be followed under all circumstances and a view that the war must be won at any cost. Actually, this is one of many places in the *Mahabharata* where this issue is discussed. And the *Mahabharata* oscillates between different positions on the matter.

87. *Mbh.* 7.48.21.

88. *Mbh.* 7.167.

89. On the resonance of the statement "Where Krishna is there is dharma," see Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 542–553.

90. For an interesting discussion of their dynamics, see Angelika Malinar, "Arguments of a Queen: Draupadī's Views on Kingship," in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata,* ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 79–96.

91. See Andrea Custodi, " 'Show You Are a Man!' Transsexuality and Gender Bending in the characters of Arjuna / Bṛhannaḍā and Ambā / Śikhaṇḍin," in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata,* ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 208–229; Wendy Doniger, "Myths of Transsexual Masquerades in Ancient India," in *India and Beyond: Aspects of Literature, Meaning, Ritual and Thought,* ed. Dick van der Meij (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 128–147.

92. *Mbh.* 12.16.21; 12.69.4–5.

93. *Bhagavadgita* 2.22; J. A. B. Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 75–77.

94. *Bhagavadgita* 2.23–24; Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgīta,* 77.

95. *Bhagavadgita* 2.39; Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgīta,* 77.

96. *Bhagavadgita* 11.27–29; Van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgīta,* 115–117.

97. *Mbh.* 10 (Sauptika Parva).

98. *Mbh.* 12.99.13–21; James L. Fitzgerald, trans., *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7: *The Book of the Women; The Book of Peace,* part 1, 416.

99. Danielle Feller Jatavallabhula, "Raṇayajña: The Mahābhārata War as a Sacrifice," in *Violence Denied,* ed. Houben and van Kooij, 69–103. The terms that occur for the "war-sacrifice" are *raṇa-yajña, raṇa-sattra,* and *śastra-yajña.*

100. *Mbh* 14.92–96.

101. *Mbh.* 11.11.5–7; Smith, *The Mahābhārata,* 584.

102. *Mbh.* 11.15.3–4; Smith, *The Mahābhārata,* 586.

103. *Mbh.* 11.16.50–52; Smith, *The Mahābhārata,* 590.

104. *Ramayana* has been abbreviated to *Ram.* in citations. Generic references are to the critical edition, G. H. Bhat and U. P. Shah, gen. eds., *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Critical Edition,* 7 vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975), and to the translations of the critical edition translated by Robert P. Goldman and others. Names of translators have been indicated, wherever applicable.

105. *Ram.* 6.15–16; Robert P. Goldman, Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, and Barend A. van Nooten, trans. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6: *Yuddhakāṇḍa,* part 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), 15–16.

106. *Ram.* 6.9. 8–10; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 140.

107. *Ram.* 6.26.4–33.

108. *Ram.* 6.19.2–4; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 165.

109. *Ram.* 6.4.78–80; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 132.

110. *Ram.* 6.15.24; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 155.
111. *Ram.* 6.62.40–43; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 335–336.
112. *Ram.,* 6.89.5; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 417.
113. *Ram.,* 6.46.25–28; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 247. Also see *Ram.,* 6.34.43–46; 6.42.9–21.
114. *Ram.,* 6.39.15; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 224.
115. Ram., 6.92.7. Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 425.
116. Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, "Sītā's War: Gender and Narrative in the Yuddhakāṇḍa of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa," in *Epic Undertakings,* Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, ed. Robert P. Goldman and Muneo Tokunaga (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), 139–168.
117. *Ram.* 4.19.
118. *Ram.* 6.82; 6.98.
119. *Ram.* 6.99.
120. *Ram.* 6.70.14–40.
121. *Ram.* 3. 8–9.
122. *Ram.* 6.12.14–15; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 149.
123. *Ram.* 6.67.37–39; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 351.
124. *Ram.* 6.101.30–37.
125. *Ram.,* 6.99.37–39; Goldman, Goldman, and van Nooten, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* vol. 6, part 1, 445.
126. *Ahiṁsā* is not mentioned often in the *Ramayana.* But the term *ānṛśaṁsya,* which is usually associated with the *Mahabharata,* occurs several times (*Ram.* 1.6.8; 2.30.12; 2.41.6; 2.56.4; 5.1.88; 5.13.47–48; 5.35.15; 5.36.34; 5.51.33; 6.12.14). In *Ram.* 5.36.34, it is described as the greatest (*para*) dharma. There are also frequent references to Ravana being cruel / violent (*nṛśaṁsa*).
127. For this discussion, I have used the text and translation of the critical edition by R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1965–1972), parts 1 and 2, as well as Olivelle's translation of the critical edition in *King, Governance and Law in Ancient India.* Generic references are to the critical edition. Specific editions have been cited only when their translations are quoted. When not specified, translations are mine. In citations hereafter, *Arthashastra* has been abbreviated to *AS*.
128. *AS* 6.2.13.
129. *AS* 6.2.18.
130. *AS* 6.2.24. For further details about the *maṇḍala*s, see Harmut Scharfe, *The State in the Indian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 108–116.
131. *AS* 6.2.19–20.
132. *AS* 6.2.38.
133. Patrick Olivelle has suggested that the translation of *saṁdhi* as peace / alliance and *vigraha* as war is incorrect. *Saṁdhi,* according to him, is best understood as "a temporary and focused contract between two parties aimed at accomplishing a specific goal, such as attacking a common enemy," a strategy aimed at outwitting the enemy. *Vigraha* can refer either to a formal declaration of war or to initiation of hostilities against another state. Olivelle, "War and Peace: Semantics of *Saṃdhi* and *Vigraha* in the *Arthaśāstra,*" in *Pūrvāparaprajñābhinandan: East and West, Past and Present. Indological and Other Essays in Honour of Klaus Karttunen, Studia Orientalia* 110, ed, Bertil Tikkanen and Albion M. Butters (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2011), 131–140. Nevertheless, in general, *saṁdhi* is associated with the cessation of hostilities and *vigraha* with the initiation of hostilities.
134. *AS* 7.16.30–32.
135. *AS* 7.9.
136. *AS* 2.7.1–3.
137. See Torkel Brekke, ed., *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilizations: A Comparative*

Perspective (London: Routledge, 2006), 80; and Brekke, "Wielding the Rod of Punishment—War and Violence in the Political Science of Kautilya," *Journal of Military Ethics* 3, no. 1 (2004): 40–52. The category of "Hindu political thought" is a very dubious one, as is the view that the *Arthashastra* is its representative.

138. *AS* 8.1.46–51.

139. See Thaplyal, *Warfare in Ancient India,* 231–253.

140. *AS* 6.1.11.

141. *AS* 9.2.21–24.

142. *AS* 1.19.9, 15–16.

143. R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1965–1972), 2, 399 n. Also see K. K. Thaplyal, *Guilds in Ancient India: A Study of Guild Organization in Northern India and Western Deccan from circa 600 BC to circa 600 AD* (New Delhi: New Age International, 1996), 149–159.

144. *AS* 8.4.27–30.

145. *AS* 5.3.3.

146. *AS* 5.3.14. The salaries of the soldiers of the other wings are not indicated.

147. They are mentioned along with many categories of *bhṛtas* and *abhṛtas*. These terms can be literally translated as servants and nonservants, or, as Kangle suggests (*The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra,* 2, 304) regular and irregular (that is, casual) employees.

148. See, for instance, *AS* 2.3; 2.18.

149. See *AS* 10.

150. *AS* 8.4.13–15.

151. *AS* 9.1.34–36.

152. *AS* 7.4.21–22.

153. *AS* 13.4.2–7.

154. *AS* 8.5.

155. Book 9 cites the *ācāryas* on which of the *śaktis* is superior and on the ideal social composition of the army. Book 10 cites Ushanas and Brihaspati on battle arrays. Book 12 cites Bharadvaja and Vishalaksha on what the weaker king should do if attacked by a stronger king. No authorities are cited in Book 11 (on oligarchies), 13 (on the means of taking a fort), and 14 (on secret practices). The terms frequently used for war in the text are *vigraha, yāna,* and *saṁgrāma.*

156. *AS* 7.1.20–31.

157. *AS* 7.10.50–53; Kautilya does give many exceptions to the latter though.

158. *AS* 7.2.1–3.

159. *AS* 9.1.9.

160. *AS* 7.7.9–10.

161. *AS* 7.8.1.

162. *AS* 7.9.1. Gain is also discussed in *AS* 9.4, along with losses and expenses.

163. The three types of war are defined in *AS* 7.6.41–42. Kangle translates *kūṭa-yuddha* as "concealed war" and Olivelle as "covert war." However the term and its description are suggestive of crookedness and trickery rather than concealment.

164. See especially *AS* 12.2.1–7.

165. Some of this is vaguely reminiscent of Ashoka's statement in his rock edict 4 that he had shown to his people celestial chariots and elephants, masses of fire, and divine figures.

166. *AS* 10.6.48–50.

167. *AS* 10.3.26.

168. *AS* 12.1.10–16.

169. *AS* 7.16. 26.

170. *AS* 10.5.58.

171. Honor and dishonor are mentioned as being important in the contexts of the calamities of the army and the *vyasanas* of the ally. Honor and money can be used to win over forest chieftains. Children of ministers and soldiers should be honored.

172. *AS* 10.3.56.

173. *AS* 9.7.3.

174. *AS* 9.6.2–4.

175. Brekke ("The Ethics of War and the Concept of War in India and Europe," 77) suggests that Kautilya did not make such distinctions.

176. *AS* 6.2.4.
177. Charles Malamoud, "Remarks on Dissuasion in Ancient India," in *Violence / Non-Violence: Some Hindu Perspectives,* ed. Denis Vidal, Gilles Tarabout, and Eric Meyer Vidal (New Delhi: Manohar and Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2003), 209–218.
178. *AS* 7.3.30.
179. *AS* 7.7.3–10.
180. *AS* 13.5.11–18.
181. *AS* 10.6.51.
182. Yates, "Making War and Making Peace in Early China," 34–52.
183. See Victor H. Mair, trans., *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
184. See R. K. Tandon, "Asian Writings on Warfare: A Comparative Study of Sun Tzu and Kautilya," in *Warfare and Politics in South Asia from Ancient to Modern Times,* ed. Kaushik Roy (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011), 41–55.
185. Mair, *The Art of War,* 85.
186. Thaplyal, *Ancient Indian Warfare,* 253–254.
187. References are to Rajendralala Mitra, ed., *The Nītisāra, or The Elements of Polity by Kāmandaki,* revised with English translation by Sisir Kumar Mitra (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, [1861] 1982), Bibliotheca Indica series, no. 179. Translations are mine. *Nitisara* has hereafter been abbreviated to *NS* in citations.
188. *NS* 10.3–5.
189. *NS* 19.54.
190. *NS* 19.15–17.
191. *NS* 10.31.
192. *NS* 9.51.
193. *NS* 10.19–23.
194. Others differed on this point. For instance, Kamandaka cites Bharadvaja as stating that a king should fight against the enemy with all his might, like a lion, and that it was possible for a weaker king to outmaneuver a stronger one through sheer courage (*NS* 9.14.56).
195. *NS* 16.14.
196. *NS* 10.24.
197. *NS* 10.35–36.
198. *NS* 12.6; 9.75.
199. *NS* 9.74.
200. *NS* 12.41.
201. *NS* 14.18.
202. *NS* 18.27.3. Kautilya is also aware of these tactics.
203. *NS* 12.7.
204. *NS* 12.58.
205. *NS* 9.73.
206. See S. Settar and Gunther D. Sontheimer, eds., *Memorial Stones: A Study of Their Origin, Significance and Variety* (Dharwad: Institute of Indian Art History, Karnatak University, Dharwad and South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, n.d.); Hans T. Bakker, "Monuments to the Dead in Ancient North India," *Indo-Iran Journal* 50 (2007) 50: 11–47, doi 10.1007 / s10783–007–9051–0.
207. Sally J. Sutherland, "Suttee, Sati, and Sahagamana: An Epic Misunderstanding?" *Economic and Political Weekly,* 29, no. 26 (June 25, 1994): 1595–1606.
208. For examples of *yaṣṭis*, see V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas* (Bombay: Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981), part 2, 115–120.
209. K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (Colombo: Kumaran Book House, [1968], 2002), 55–93; David Shulman, "Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend," in David Shulman, *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63–102.
210. Several poems graphically describe the starvation and penury experienced by poets and their families and end in a plea for patronage.
211. *Purananuru* 278; George L. Hart III, *Poets of the Tamil Anthologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 199; the song of Kakkaipatiniyar Nachchellaiyar. It should

be noted that this poem, with its grim glorification of death in battle, was composed by a woman.

212. *Purananuru* 219; Hart, *Poets of the Tamil Anthologies,* 186.

213. K. Rajan, "Life after Death: From Mortal Remains to Monuments," in *Mapping the Chronology of Bhakti—Milestones, Stepping Stones and Stumbling Stones,* ed. Valerie Gillet, Proceedings of a workshop held in honour of Pandit R. Varadadesikan (Pondicherry: Instituut Français de Pondichéry and Ecole française d'Extreme-Orient, 2014), 221–239.

214. D. C. Sircar, "More Inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda," *Epigraphia Indica* 35 (1963–64): 13–17.

215. *Purananuru* 247; George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz, *The Puṟanāṉūṟu: Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom: An Anthology of Poems from Classical Tamil* (New Delhi: Penguin, [1999] 2002), 152.

216. K. V. Soundararajan, with contributions from R. Subrahmanyam, K. V. Soundara Rajan, M. D. Khare, B. N. Misra, Vidyadhara Rao, H. Sarkar, K. Krishnamurthy, Abdul Wahid Khan, and T. V. G. Sastri, eds., *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60),* vol. 2: *The Historical Period* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1994), 242–243.

217. B. Chhabra and G.S. Gai, eds., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 3 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981), 353–354. The title of the text is hereafter abbreviated in citations to *CII* 3.

218. *Purananuru* 23; Hart and Heifetz, *The Puṟanāṉūṟu,* 19.

219. *Purananuru* 255; Hart and Heifetz, *The Puṟanāṉūṟu,* 155.

220. For a discussion of the identification of these terms, see F. Kielhorn, "Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman, the Year 72," *Epigraphia Indica* 8 (1905–1906): 36–49.

221. The *svayaṁvara* is a form of marriage in which a woman of a royal or Kshatriya family chooses her husband in a gathering of assembled suitors.

222. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions,* part 2, 112–113.

223. Ibid., 27–28.

224. Ibid., 44–49. The identification of the place names is discussed by Mirashi.

225. V. V. Mirashi, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 5. Ootacamund: Archaeological Survey of India, 1963. Hereafter abbreviated to *CII* 5.

226. Ibid., 81.

227. Ibid., 117.

228. Ibid., 21; Belora plates of Pravarasena II, set A.

229. Ibid., 22–27.

230. For the Gupta inscriptions, see B. Chhabra and G. S. Gai, eds., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 3 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981). Hereafter abbreviated to *CII* 3.

231. Ibid., 97–99.

232. Ibid., 257.

233. Mehrauli iron pillar inscription. Chhabra and Gai, *CII* 3, 257–259. Translation mine.

234. Ibid., 203–219.

235. Lines 17–18; adapted from Chhabra and Gai, *CII* 3, 217.

236. For a summary of the possible identifications of the various kings and places, see Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the Twelfth Century* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2008), 477–478.

237. We may note that a Chinese text refers to king Meghavarna of Sri Lanka sending a mission accompanied by gifts to Samudragupta, asking for permission to build a monastery and rest house for Sri Lankan pilgrims at Bodhgaya. The permission was evidently granted and the monastery built; its magnificence was described by Xuanzang in the seventh century.

238. Chhabra and Gai, *CII* 3, 315–317.

239. They are also mentioned in a circa 600 CE grammatical work, the *Sutravritti* of Chandragomin. For a history of the Hunas or Ephtalites in India, see Atreyi Biswas, *The Political History of the Hūṇas in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971); and Upendra Thakur, *The Hūṇas in India* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1967).

240. Thakur, *The Hūṇas in India,* 52–55.

241. Verse 4. Verses 17–18 of this inscription also refer to the king's respect for all heroism except for heroism shown on stage (that is, heroism as an act).

242. See Hans T. Bakker, "Monuments of Hope, Gloom, and Glory in the Age of the Hunnic

Wars: 50 Years that Changed India (484–534)," Twenty-Fourth Jan Gonda Lecture, November 25, 2016 (Amsterdam: Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017).

243. Biswas, *A Political History of the Hūṇas in India,* 144–149.

244. Chhabra and Gai, *CII* 3, 307.

245. The words used for war are *raṇa, saṁgrāma, āhava,* and *yuddha. Senā* and *bala* are used for the army. References in this section are to K. P. A. Menon, *Complete Plays of Bhāsa,* text with English translation and notes, 3 vols. [Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996], hereafter abbreviated to *Bhāsa*. In all cases, translations given are mine.

246. Dhritarashtra too is shown dying—of grief—on stage.

247. *Bhāsa,* 1:380.

248. Actually there are four weapons, to which is added a conch-shell.

249. *Bhāsa,* vol. 1, 378–379.

250. Ibid., 373.

251. Ibid., 262.

252. Ibid., 345.

253. Ibid., 250.

254. According to A. K. Warder (*Indian Kāvya Literature* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, (1974) 1990], 2, 276) the *Pancharatra* could be an experiment and variation on a type of play called the *Samavakara* ("cooperation play").

255. A. C. Woolner and Lakshman Sarup, cited in ibid., 278.

256. The published sources of the text used for this analysis are C. R. Devadhar, ed. and trans., *Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1985] 2005); supplemented by the *Raghuvaṁśa-mahākāvya* with Mallinātha's commentary, and *vyākhyā* and Hindi translation by Acharya Dharadatta Mishra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1974] 2004). Generic references are to Devadhar's edition; however, translations given are mine. In citations, *Raghuvamsha* has hereafter been abbreviated to *RV*.

257. According to Daniel H. H. Ingalls (*An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyākara's Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa,* Harvard Oriental Series vol. 44, Unesco Collection of Representative Works, [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965], 39), Sanskrit literature was more concerned with love than with war because of its Brahmana connections and because love was in greater consonance with the religious ideal of unity that most Sanskrit writers espoused.

258. *RV* 4. 24–87.

259. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, [2006] 2007), 241.

260. For a development of this argument, see Upinder Singh, "Portraits of Power: Samudragupta and Raghu," Thirty-First K. P. Jayaswal Memorial Lectures, November 27, 2016 (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 2017).

261. *RV* 4.33.

262. *RV* 4.37.

263. *RV* 4.63.

264. *RV* 4, 61; *RV* 4.68.

265. The text used for this discussion is R. S. Walimbe, *Viśākhadatta: Mudrārākṣasa* (Poona: Royal Book Stall, 1948). In citations, the text is hereafter abbreviated to *MR.* Unless otherwise indicated, translations given are mine.

266. *MR,* act 7, v. 10.

267. The edition used here is Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); hereafter abbreviated to *PT*. Translations given below are Olivelle's.

268. *PT,* 55.

269. Olivelle, *PT,* 49–50.

270. Olivelle, *PT,* 69.

271. Olivelle, *PT,* 141, verse 105.

272. M. Ramakrishna Bhat, *Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṁhitā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), vol. 1, 43, 344–360.

273. Ibid., 44, 361–68.

274. See Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India: A Study in Attitudes towards Outsiders up to AD 600* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991), chap. 7.

275. See Upinder Singh, “Gifts from Other Lands: Southeast Asian Religious Endowments in India,” in *Asian Encounters: Exploring Connected Histories,* ed. Upinder Singh and Parul Pandya Dhar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57–58.

276. See, for instance, Kaushik Roy, ed., *Warfare and Politics in South Asia from Ancient to Modern Times* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011); Kaushik Roy, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia: From Antiquity to the Present* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Raziuddin Aquil and Kaushik Roy, eds., *Warfare, Religion, and Society in Indian History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012); Christopher Key Chapple, *Peace, War and Violence in Hinduism* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1995] 2011).

277. See, for instance, Torkel Brekke, ed., *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilizations: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006); Richard Sorabji and David Rodin, eds., *Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Gregory M. Reichberg and Henrik Syse, with Nicole Hartwell, eds., *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Brekke, “The Ethics of War and the Concept of War.”

278. Brekke, “The Ethics of War and the Concept of War.”

279. Raj Balkaran and A. Walter Dorn, “Violence in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Just War Criteria in an Ancient Indian Epic,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 3 (2012): 659–690.

1. See Duane W. Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," in *Brill's New Jacoby,* ed. Ian Worthington, Brill Online, 2012, www.brillonline.nl.

2. Klaus Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature,* Studia Orientalia 65 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1989), 122–134, 231–235. Distinguishing between civilized people and barbarians (with semi-savage nomads in between the two) and descriptions of fantastic animals and people were parts of the Greek ethnographic tradition. Karttunen has discussed the tales about India in the context of this larger Greek ethnographic tradition and has tried to correlate them with references in Indian sources.

3. Ibid., 160–192.

4. Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 8, 33–36.

5. According to Thomas R. Trautmann (*Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* [Ranikhet: Permanent Black, in association with Ashoka University, 2015], 130–131), Nearchus was talking about the Indus valley at the time of Alexander, whereas Megasthenes was talking about the eastern countries at a later date, after the establishment of the Maurya empire. Another possibility is that Megasthenes simply got it wrong, as was the case with his assertions that in India there was no slavery and no writing, and that all land was owned by the king.

6. Ctesius and Xenophon, cited in Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature,* 160, 163–4.

7. Strabo *Geographica* 15.1.55; Roller, "Megasthenes (715)," 47.

8. See Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History,* Encounters with Asia series, ed. Victor H. Mair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2, 11–12.

9. See H. H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World: Aspects of Greek and Roman Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

10. Grant Parker, *The Making of Roman India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 160–163.

11. Michael Williams, *Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 355–356.

12. The *Amarakosha,* an ancient Sanskrit thesaurus, lists various synonyms including *aṭavi, araṇya, vipina, gahana, kānana,* and *vana.*

13. See Francis Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1982] 2011).

14. Stephanie Jamison, "The Function of Animals in the *Rig Veda, RV* X.28, and the Origin of Story Literature in India," in *Pense, dire et représenter l'animal dans le monde indien,* ed. N. Balbir and G. J.Pinault (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 197–218.

15. J. C. Heesterman, "The Conundrum of the King's Authority," in J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117–122.

16. Charles Malamoud, "Village and Forest in the Ideology of Brahmanic India," in Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79–81.

17. *Shatapatha Brahmana,* 5.5.4.18, cited in Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia's Lions,* rev. ed. (Mumbai: Marg [2005] 2008), 68. This sacrifice was supposed to offset an excessive indulgence in drinking the spirituous soma drink.

18. A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1925]1996), part 2, 341–343.

19. Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origins of Caste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 8.

20. Ibid., 255. I have replaced Smith's "jungle" with "forest."

21. Malamoud, "Village and Forest," 84. Malamoud makes the interesting observation that the Vedic texts rank animals according to their resemblance to humans. The elephant uses his trunk the way that humans use their hands, and the monkey bears physical resemblance to humans. The *puruṣamedha* (human sacrifice) is described in the ritual texts, but historical kings do not claim to have performed it. G. R. Sharma (*Excavations at Kauśāmbī (1957–59)* [Allahabad: Allahabad University Publications, 1960], 15, 87–126) has argued that a hawk-

shaped altar found in the excavations at Kaushambi represents a performance of the *puruṣamedha*, but this has been contested.

22. Johannes Bronkhorst (*Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 249–250) suggests that the early Upanishads breathe a village atmosphere, whereas according to Patrick Olivelle (*The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], 9), they reflect "if not an urban environment, then at least one that is in the process of urbanization" and a social background consisting "by and large … of court and crafts, rather than village and agriculture."

23. *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* 1.1.28, *Manusmriti* 2.22, *Vishnu Dharmasutra* 84.4, and *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* 1.1.31, cited in P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, [1941, 1946] 1990, 1993, 1997), vol. 2, pt. 1, 13–15.

24. Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India: A Study in Attitudes towards Outsiders up to AD 600* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991). The term occurs in *Shatapatha Brahmana* 3.2.1.24, but comes into frequent use only in post-Vedic texts.

25. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 2, pt. 1, 43–101.

26. *Aitareya Brahmana* 33.6. Hunting is described as one of the vocations of the Andhras, Antyajas (a generic term for various low strata of society), Ugras, Chinas, Chunchus, Medas, Madgus, Lubdhakas, and Vyadhas. Fishing is one of the vocations of the Jalopajivins, Dasas, Dhivaras, Matsyabandhakas, and Margavas (cited in ibid.).

27. See *Manusmriti* 9.178; 10.8; 10.43–45 (cited in Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 2, pt. 1, 86, 131). *Manusmriti* has hereafter been abbreviated to *MS*.

28. *MS* 99, 100; 2.79, 104; Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2006), 99–100.

29. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* vol. 2, pt. 2, 932–939.

30. Ibid., 918–929.

31. Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 100. The low groups include "untouchables" such as the Chandalas and tribals such as the Nishadas and Pukkusas.

32. Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṁghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 45.

33. Ibid., 95.

34. Olivelle (*Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions* [London: Anthem Press, 2011], 12) points out that ploughed land was a symbol of human culture and society. *Vānaprasthas* were not supposed to step on ploughed land or enter villages.

35. *Buddhacharita* 5.7; Patrick Olivelle, text and trans., *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa* (New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2009), 129.

36. There is the odd reference to potentially domesticated animals such as the dog, cat, goat, bull, cow, pig, ox, and horse.

37. Mammals include the antelope, ass, tiger, panther, bear, wolf, fox, and hare. Among birds, parrots, geese, and crows feature frequently, followed by the partridge, quail, peacock, and pigeon. Others include the cock, owl, cuckoo, falcon, hawk, vulture, osprey, heron, crane, roc, woodpecker, and jay. There are snakes (generic as well as specific types such as cobra and water snake), fish, tortoises, crabs, and crocodiles. Rodents include the rat, mouse, lizard, chameleon, iguana, and mongoose. Insects such as the mosquito and beetle occur rarely. Mythical animals include the *garuḍa* bird.

38. It should be noted that the snake is extremely important in ancient Indian religious thought and practice. The worship of *nāgas* and *nāgīs* (male and female snakes) was part of an ancient and still continuing fertility cult, and snakes are woven into the mythology and iconography of many gods and saints.

39. Jataka no. 31, C. W. Cowell, ed. *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births,* translated by Robert Chalmers, 6 vols. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, [1895–1907] 1990–2001), 1:76–32. This has hereafter been abbreviated to Cowell.

40. Jataka no. 124, Cowell, 1:273–274.

41. Jataka, no. 483, Cowell, 4:166–174.

42. Jataka no. 12, Cowell, 1:36–42.

43. Jataka no. 502, Cowell, 4:264–267.

44. Jataka no. 502, Cowell 4:265.

45. Monika Zin, "Śabaras, the Vile Hunters in Heavenly Spheres: The Inhabitants of the Jungle in Indian Art, Especially in the Ajanta Paintings," in *South Asian Archaeology 1999,* ed. Ellen M. Raven, Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, University of Leiden, July 5–9, 1999 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2008), 375–394. These couples occur on the gateway of Stupa 3 and the eastern gateway of Stupa 1 at Sanchi. The Bharhut relief is part of the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, acc. no. 68.163.

46. Ibid., 378. Zin also suggests that the idea of the tribal people contributed to the development of the idea of the *kiṁpuruṣas*, creatures who were part human, part bird.

47. As mentioned earlier, *aṭavi* means "forest," but here it is used in the sense of *āṭavikāḥ*—forest people and / or forest chieftains.

48. Rock edict 13, lines 7–8. The Girnar, Yerragudi, and Kalsi versions mention *mādava,* gentleness or kindness. The word does not occur in the Shahbazgarhi version, which refers to *samacariyaṁ rabhasiye,* which can be translated as "impartiality in case of violence." There is a striking similarity between Ashoka's admonition to the forest people and his statement to the unconquered borderers in separate rock edict 2, where the king states that he will forgive that which can be forgiven.

49. The horse, deer, and geese appear on the abaci. Other animals may have crowned lost pillars, but we can go only by the surviving ones.

50. See Upinder Singh "Texts on Stone: Understanding Aśoka's Epigraph-Monuments and Their Changing Contexts," *Indian Historical Review* 24 (1998): 6–9.

51. These details are drawn from Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia's Lions.*

52. Ibid., 70.

53. Raman Sukumar, *The Story of Asia's Elephants* (Mumbai: Marg, 2011), 38.

54. Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia's Lions,* 61.

55. This bull has a very prominent dewlap, unlike the one on the Rampurva capital.

56. Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia's Lions,* 57–58.

57. Ibid., 61.

58. There is debate about the meaning of the word *hida* (here) ,which precedes these announcements. Rather than referring only to the places where the edicts were inscribed, this word should be understood as meaning "here, in my dominion."

59. Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts* (Mains am Rheim: Verlag Philipp Zabern, 2006), 110. D. C. Sircar's reading (*Aśokan Studies* [Calcutta: Indian Museum, (1979) 2000], 101) is completely different.

60. The animals and their tentative identifications (after Hultzsch and Sircar) are: *suka* (parrot), *sālika* (maina bird), *aluna* (a reddish-brown bird), *cakavāka* (goose), *haṁsa* (bar-headed goose), *nandimukha* (a type of water bird), *gelāṭa* (?), *jatūka* (bat), *ambākapīlika* (queen ants or mango-tree ants), *daḷī* (terrapin turtle), *anaṭhikamacha* (boneless fish), *vedaveyaka* (some kind of fish), *gaṅgāpupuṭaka* (an aquatic animal living in the Ganga River, possibly the Gangetic dolphin), *saṅkujamacha* (skate fish), *kaphaṭa* (tortoise), *sayaka* (porcupine), *paṅnasasa* (leaf hare), *simala* (antler stag), *saṇḍaka* (wild bull), *okapiṇḍa* (?), *palasata* (rhinoceros), *setakapota* (white dove / pigeon), and *gāmakapota* (village pigeon).

61. K. R. Norman, "Notes on Aśoka's Fifth Pillar Edict," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 / 2 (1967): 26–32. According to Norman, *gelāṭa* is a mistake for *golāṭa* (a reddish duck—either the red-crested pochard or the pink-headed duck); *jatūka* is the fruit bat that favors water; *duḍi anaṭhikamacha* are hard- and soft-shelled turtles; *vedaveyaka* is probably a water snake; *saṅkujamacha* could be the sea cow; *kaphaṭaseyaka* is the pangolin; *paṅnasasa simala* is the cobra; *saṇḍaka* is the lizard or chameleon; *okapiṇḍa* is the gecko lizard; *palasata* is, as suggested by Senart, an error for *pārāpata,* the turtle dove.

62. Shibani Bose (personal communication) points out that the Indian rhinoceros, while a very adaptable animal, prefers habitats that provide ample wallows and swampy feeding grounds. In spite of the absence of rhinoceros bones at excavated sites, the depictions in terracotta and soapstone seals and discs cited by Joachim Bautze ("The Problem of the Khaḍga (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in the Light of Archaeological Finds and Art," *South Asian Archaeology,* ed. in J. Schotsman, J. Taddei, and M. Taddei [N.p.]: n. pub., 1983], 405–433) suggest that in Ashoka's time these animals were around, at least in the middle and lower Gangetic valley. In fact, Bautze points out that as late as the eighteenth century, there were so many rhinoceroses in North Bengal and Assam that a French map of India describes that area

as “Contrée de Rhinoceros.” Norman (“Notes on Aśoka’s Fifth Pillar Edict,” 31) suggests that the word *palasata,* translated by Hultzsch as rhinoceros, is, as Senart suggests, a scribal error for *pārāpata,* the turtle dove.

63. In Sanskrit, the word *nāga* can mean snake or elephant. In the classification of forests, it refers to elephants.

64. These are the three Chaturmasis (the full moon days of the three months of Ashadha, Karttika, and Phalguna) and the Tishya full moon (that is, the full moon day of the Tishya constellation, in the month of Pausha), for three days in each case—the fourteenth and fifteenth day of one lunar fortnight and the first of the next. G. Bühler (“The Pillar Edicts of Aśoka,” *Epigraphia Indica* 2 [1894]: 264) sees this prohibition as applicable to the other months as well, and states that they added up to fifty-six days in all. On the meaning of Chaturmasi, see D. C. Sircar, *Inscriptions of Aśoka* (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, [1957] 1967), 23.

65. These were the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth day of every lunar fortnight, as well as the (full moon days of) Tishya, Punarvasu, and the three Chaturmasis.

66. These were the (full moon days of) Tishya, Punarvasu, and the fortnights of the Chaturmasis.

67. Aloka Parasher-Sen, “Of Tribes, Hunters and Barbarians: Forest Dwellers in the Mauryan Period,” in *India’s Environmental History: From Ancient Times to the Colonial Period: A Reader,* ed. Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), 1: 141–142.

68. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History,* 96–100.

69. Romila Thapar, “Perceiving the Forest in Early India,” in *India’s Environmental History,* ed. Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan, 1:118.

70. Parasher-Sen, “Of Tribes, Hunters and Barbarians,” 141–143.

71. A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas: A Vanished Indian Religion* (London: Luzac, 1951), 122–123.

72. For early Buddhist perspectives on the relationship between animals and humans, see James P. McDermott, “Animals and Humans in Early Buddhism,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 32 (1989): 269–80.

73. John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 221.

74. Generic references to the *Mahabharata* (hereafter abbreviated to *Mbh*.) are to the critical edition, V. S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya, gen. eds., *The Mahābhārata, for the First Time Critically Edited,* 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1966), and the digital version of this made available by John D. Smith and Muneo Tokunaga. Specific publications and page numbers have been cited only where translations are quoted.

75. *Mbh.* 1.217.1–13; J. A. B. van Buitenan, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata,* vol. 1: *The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 417–418.

76. J. A. B. van Buitenan, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata,* vol. 2: *The Book of the Beginning; The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), introduction, 177–178.

77. *Mbh.* 3.35. 21; van Buitenan, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata,* 2:292.

78. *Mbh.* 12.59.101–103; James L. Fitzgerald, *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7: *The Book of the Women; The Book of Peace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 309–310.

79. *Mbh.* 1.123.18–23; J. A. B. Buitenen, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata,* vol. 1: *The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973), 271.

80. *Mbh.* 1.132–136.

81. *Mbh* 12.133.1–25.

82. *Mbh.* 12.133.8–9; Fitzgerald, *Mahabhārata,* vol. 7, 509.

83. *Mbh.* 12.65.13–24.

84. *Mbh.* 3.198–206.

85. *Mbh.* 13.115–7.

86. *Mbh.* 3.244; J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata,* vol. 2, 698–699.

87. *Ramayana.* 2.30.19–20; Sheldon Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India,* vol. 2: *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1984], 2007), 147. *Ramayana* has hereafter been abbreviated to *Ram*. in citations. Generic references to the text are to the critical edition, G. H. Bhat and U. P. Shah, gen. eds., *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Critical Edition,* 7

vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–1975), digital versions of which are available due to the effort of John D. Smith and Muneo Tokunaga. Specific volumes have only been cited where translations have been used.

88. Sheldon Pollock, "Rākṣasas and Others," *Indologica Taurinensia* 13 (1985–86): 263–281.

89. *Ram.* 2.18–20.

90. *Ram.* 2.20.20–21; Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 127.

91. *Ram.* 2. 97–103.

92. *Ram.* 2.101.26–27; Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 302.

93. *Ram.* 3.8.

94. *Ram.* 3.8.6. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 100.

95. *Ram.* 2.57–58.

96. *Ram.,* 2.58.45–46. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 210.

97. *Ram.* 2.22.6–8. Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 131.

98. *Ram.* 2.88.15–16, 18; Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa,* vol. 2, 269.

99. Guha later says that Rama had refused to accept any gifts from him as it was the Kshatriya way to give, and not receive, gifts.

100. *Ram.* 2.44.18.

101. *Ram.* 2.46.59.

102. *Ram.* 2.45.7.

103. As mentioned earlier, the rulers of the kingdom of Kishkindha are described as kings of the *vānaras* (monkeys) and ṛkṣas. The latter term is sometimes understood as referring to bears, but they were probably a variety of monkeys.

104. *Ram.* 4.18.34–36.

105. *Arthashastra* 6.1.8. References are to the critical edition of R. P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1965–1972), parts 1 and 2. *Arthashastra* has hereafter been abbreviated to *AS*. Translations given are mine.

106. *AS* 2.6.6.

107. *AS* 2.35.3.

108. *AS* 2.2.5.

109. *AS* 2.17.17.

110. On the larger body of "elephant knowledge" in ancient and medieval India, see Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings,* chap. 4.

111. Theoretically, it is possible that other types of produce in those forests could be exploited by private individuals, but such selective extraction would have been difficult to monitor.

112. *AS* 5.2.3.

113. *AS* 5.3.11.

114. *AS* 2.2.13–14.

115. *AS* 2.2.15–16.

116. Trautman, *Elephants and Kings,* 12–13. This book contains an excellent discussion of the history of the war elephant and the relationship between elephants and kings in Eurasia. For a discussion of the location of the elephant forests in the *Arthashastra* and later texts, also see Thomas R. Trautmann, "Elephants and the Mauryas," In *India's Environmental History,* ed. Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan, 170–177.

117. *AS* 2.2.6.

118. *AS* 2.2.6–9.

119. *AS* 2.2.10–11. Domesticated two-footed and four-footed animals are included in the village census. Similarly, the *godhyakṣa,* who supervises state herds, is to supervise the branding of animals and maintain records of the herd animals.

120. *AS* 2.17.

121. *AS* 2.17.4–16.

122. *AS* 2.17.13. There are a few overlaps (dolphin, rhinoceros, deer) between this list and the list of inviolable animals in Ashoka's pillar edict 5.

123. *AS* 14.3.

124. *AS* 2.17.14.

125. *AS* 2.17.16.

126. *AS* 2.17.17. The term *kupyopajīvin* in this verse clearly refers to the officer in charge of the forest, and not forest-dwellers.

127. *AS* 2.18.7–16.
128. *AS* 8.3.46.
129. *AS* 5.6.10.
130. *AS* 2.2.3.
131. *AS* 2.26.4.
132. *AS* 2.26.4.
133. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasia,* 41–42.
134. *AS* 8.4.44–45.
135. *AS* 2.2.5–6.
136. The terms for "hunter" are *vyādha* and *lubdhaka,* and the term *śvagaṇin* has been translated as "fowler."
137. *AS* 3.1.2, 9.
138. *AS* 4.10.2.
139. *AS* 3.11.1.
140. *AS* 4.5.15–16.
141. *AS* 8.5.43.
142. *AS* 1.21.1.
143. AS 1.12.9. Harmut Scharfe (cited by Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance and Law in Ancient India* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013], 480 n.) suggests that dwarfs and hunchbacks were supposed to walk in front of the king in order to avert the evil eye. This is not very convincing, and it remains unclear why the Kiratas are included in this grouping.
144. *AS* 13.3.58.
145. *AS* 7.10.16.
146. *AS* 7.14.27.
147. *AS* 2.16.20–21.
148. *AS* 2.2.2.
149. *AS* 2.1.7. *AS* 2.1.9 can be interpreted as suggesting that the king should give uncultivated land to those who will till it, and make it free from taxes, but this is not entirely certain.
150. *AS* 2.26.7–11.
151. *AS* 2.15.50–59; 2.30.18–25; 2.31.11–15.
152. *AS* 2.31; 2.32.
153. *AS* 2.32.22. According to S. Sukumar (personal communication), while the difference in timing of cutting the tusk indicates a difference in the rate of growth of tusks depending on the habitat, the reason for recommending leaving a length double the circumference of the root (that is, the base) was to ensure that the trimming did not expose the pulp cavity with nerves and blood vessels that could potentially get infected.
154. M. Ramakrishna Bhat, *Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṁhitā,* 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 94.1.
155. *AS* 2.31.8–9.
156. *AS* 7.12.9–12; 8.4.45.
157. *AS* 2.4.5.
158. *AS* 2.30.
159. *AS* 2.26.6.
160. The scale of fines given in *AS* 3.17.8–10 for the lowest, middle, and highest fines is as follows: 48–96 *paṇas*, 200–500 *paṇas*, 500–100 *paṇas*.
161. *AS* 4.3.1. The others are fire, floods, disease, famine, and evil spirits.
162. *AS* 2.26.3.
163. *AS* 2.26.4.
164. *AS* 4.3.16; 2.30.27–28; 2.32.18; 4.13.20–21; 4.13.22.
165. *AS* 1.7.8. There is also a reference in a conversation that spies should have with each other to instigate angry people in another land: They should compare the king with an elephant blinded by intoxication and mounted by an intoxicated driver and destroying the people, and should say that he can be harmed by instigating a rival elephant (that is, king) against him (*AS* 1.14.7).
166. *Nitisara* 5.78–79. References are to Rajendralala Mitra, ed., *The Nītisāra, or The Elements of Polity by Kāmandaki,* revised with English translation by Sisir Kumar Mitra (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, [1861] 1982), Bibliotheca Indica series, no. 179. *Nitisara* has

hereafter been abbreviated to *NS* in references. Translations given are mine.

167. *NS* 19.9–10.

168. *NS* 7.41–50.

169. *NS* 15.19–22.

170. *NS* 15.23–24.

171. *NS* 2.36.

172. *NS* 15.25.

173. *NS* 15.27. This is in sharp contrast to Kautilya, who describes hunting as the least harmful, and gambling as the most harmful of the *vyasanas* (*AS* 8.3).

174. *NS* 15.26.

175. *NS* 15.28–40.

176. *NS* 15.28. References to such a sanitized forest occur in *AS* 1.21.23; 2.20.3.

177. K. P. A. Menon, *Complete Plays of Bhāsa,* text with English translation and notes, 3 vols. [Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996), 1:126. This series has henceforth been abbreviated to *Bhāsa* in references. Translations given are mine.

178. *Bhāsa,* 2:183–185.

179. *Bhāsa*, vol. 1: 54; vol. 2: 38, 90, 187, 185, 199.

180. *Bhāsa,* 2: 221.

181. Daniela Rossella ("The Indian Forest: Nobody's Land or Everybody's?," in *The City and the Forest in Indian Literature and Art,* ed. Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska [Warsaw: Don Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2010], 149) points out that unlike in the epics, the forest in *kāvya* usually remains unnamed. She connects this anonymity of the forest with the characters of *kāvya,* which can also be seen as "types" rather than individuals. References to the *Abhijnanashakuntala* are to C. R. Devadhar, *Works of Kālidāsa,* vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, [1966] 2005). Hereafter, the title of the text has been abbreviated to *Abhi.* Translations given are mine.

182. *Abhi.*; Devadhar, *Plays of Kālidāsa,* 1:24.

183. Ibid., 1:57, act 2, v. 13.

184. Ibid., 1:10.

185. Ibid., 1:40. Later, the king also mentions buffaloes among the hunter's prey.

186. *Abhi.* act 2, verse 5.

187. *Raghuvamsha* 1.44. References are to C. R. Devadhar, ed. and trans., *Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1985] 2005). Translations are mine. *Raghuvamsha* has hereafter been abbreviated to *RV* in citations.

188. *RV* 1.45.

189. *RV* 4.36.

190. *RV* 9.49.

191. *RV* 9.53. On the difference in approach toward hunting in these two texts and on the sanitized forest, see Singh, "Politics, Violence and War in Kāmandaka's *Nītisāra,*" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 1 (2010): 49–52.

192. See Sukumar, *The Story of Asia's Elephants,* 55; Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings,* 45. It should be noted that the portrayal of the elephant (and the tiger) on Harappan seals shows that its political and religious importance predates the rise of the early historic states.

193. *BS,* 48.43–45; 66; 67.

194. Ibid., 68. 4–5.

195. One is in the Lucknow Museum and the other in the Pankaj Tandon collection. See Pankaj Tandon, "The Lion Conqueror Type of Kumaragupta I," *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 212 (Summer 2012): 22–23. Tandon states that these coins show a lion carcass, but I think this is unlikely.

196. Pankaj Tandon, "The Identity of Prakāśāditya,"*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, no. 4 (2015): 647–668.

197. This point has been recognized by Tandon, "The Lion Conqueror Type of Kumaragupta I."

Conclusion

1. For similar statements elsewhere, see P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra,* 3rd ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, [1946] 1993), 3:24–25. For a list of "despots" who are killed in ancient Indian texts, see Walter Ruben, "Fighting against Despots in Old Indian Literature," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 48 / 49 (1968): 111–118.

2. Pallava period stones (sixth–ninth century) from South India depict a many-armed, weapon-wielding goddess, standing on a buffalo, framed by kneeling devotees shedding blood and cutting off their own heads. She can be connected with Durga Mahishasuramardini as well as with a southern goddess named Korravai. See Charlotte Schmid, "Rite and Representation: Recent Discoveries of Pallava Goddesses of the Tamil Land," *Marg* 63, no. 2 (2011): 84–89; Charlotte Schmid, "Du Rite au Mythe: Les Tueses de Buffle de l'Inde Ancienne," *Artibus Asiae* 71 (2011): 115–161. Such imagery reflects a visualization of a powerful connection between femininity, sacrifice, and war.

3. J. C. Heesterman (*The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985], 2) perceptively points out that behind the apparent flexibility of the Brahmanical tradition in dharma-related matters lies the unresolved inner conflict between the atemporal order and temporal change.

4. Lambert L. Schmithausen, "Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History,* ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Boston: Brill, 1999), 57–58.

5. See Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mahinda Deegalle, "The Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia," in *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions,* ed. Gregory M. Reichberg and Henrik Syse, with Nicole Hartwell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 591–592.

6. Paul Demiéville, "Buddhism and War," trans. Michelle Kendall, in *Buddhist Warfare,* ed. Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17–74.

7. Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009).

8. For diametrically different understandings of the *Ramayana*'s place in the political imagination of later centuries, see Sheldon Pollock, "Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India," in *Religious Movements in South Asia 600–1800,* ed. David Lorenzen, Debates in Indian History and Society series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 153–208; B. D. Chattopadhyaya, "Anachronism of Political Imagination," in B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 98–115. Pollock has argued that the *Ramayana*'s promotion of the divinized king and the demonization of the Other made it a potent resource for communal polarization. Chattopadhyaya makes a strong case for a much more variegated political discourse in which Rama was not the central figure. Also see Hans T. Bakker, "Reflections on the Evolution of Rāma Devotion in the Light of Textual and Archaeological Evidence," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* 31 (1987): 9–42.

9. A. K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan,* ed. Vinay Dharwadker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131–160. Also see Paula Richman, "Questioning and Multiplicity within the Ramayana Tradition," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition,* ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1–21.

10. See B. N. Sumitra Bai and Robert J. Zydenbos, "The Jaina Mahābhārata," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata,* ed. Arvind Sharma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass [1991] 2007), 251–273.

11. Audrey Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 506–520. For the larger context, see Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2016).

12. See A. G. Menon and G. H. Schokker, "The Concept of Rāma-rājya in South and North Indian Literature," in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: Essays in Honour of J. C. Heesterman,* ed. A. W. Van Den Hoek, D. H. A. Kolff, and M. S. Oort, Memoirs of the Kern

Institute, no. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 615.

13. It has been argued that commenting on this text allowed Indian intellectuals to think about politics and ethics in universal terms and to participate in transnational conversations (Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji, eds., *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* [Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013], xii).

14. "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." Oppenheimer was quoting a translation of *Bhagavadgita* 11.32 (*kālo'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho*), which is part of Krishna's speech when he reveals his terrifying cosmic form to Arjuna.

15. Prathama Banerjee, "Chanakya / Kautilya: History, Philosophy, Theater and the Twentieth-Century Political," *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 2, no. 1 (2012): 24–51.

16. Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xli–xlii.

17. See Channabasappa S. Patil, "Pañcatantra Sculptures and Literary Traditions in India and Indonesia: A Comparative Study," in *Narrative Sculpture and Literary Traditions in South and Southeast Asia,* ed. Marijke Klokke (Leiden, Brill, 2000), 73–95. Patil has counted about 180 such sculptures ranging from the seventh to fifteenth centuries.

18. Two of the paintings, one in water color and the other in oil, illustrate the *Panchatantra* story of the tortoise and the hare. I am indebted to Ella Dattta for this information.

19. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, [2006] 2007).

20. O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 42.

21. See Upinder Singh and Parul Pandya Dhar, eds., *Asian Encounters: Exploring Connected Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), introduction.

22. M. B. Hooker, ed., *Laws of South-East Asia,* vol. 1: *The Pre-Modern Texts* (Singapore: Butterworth, 1986), introduction.

23. Ryuji Okudaira, "The Burmese Dhammathat," in ibid., 23–142.

24. Helen Creese, "Old Javanese Legal Traditions in Pre-Colonial Bali," *Bijdragen* 165, nos. 2–3 (2009): 241–290.

25. See Malini Saran and Vinod C. Khanna, *The Ramayana in Indonesia* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2004), 135–138. For a discussion of the various Asian tellings of the *Ramayana* see V. Raghavan, ed., *The Rāmāyaṇa Tradition in Asia* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980).

26. See Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 76–77. Also see Peter Skilling, "Jātaka and Paññāsa-jātaka in South-East Asia," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 28 (2006): 113–173.

27. See, for instance, Robert L. Brown, "Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia,* ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 64–109.

28. Ratan Parimoo, "Offering the Flesh of the Body: Jātaka Stories in Central Asian and Himalayan Art," in *The Art of Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent: in Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Anupa Pande (New Delhi: Aryan Books International for National Museum Institute, 2010), 87–96.

29. Sema 'an I. Salem and Alok Kumar, trans. and eds., *Science in the Medieval World "Book of the Categories of Nations" by Ṣā 'd al-Andalusī,* History of Science Series, no. 5 (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1991] 1996), 13–14.

30. Edward C. Sachau trans. *Alberuni's India* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 1: 159.

31. Franklin Edgerton, trans., *The Panchatantra* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 10.

32. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men,* 125–127, 162–164. R. C. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Kambuja* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1953), 232–268; Supomo Worsley and Fletcher Hunter, eds., *Mpu Monaguṇa Sumanasāntaka: An Old Javanese Epic poem, Its Indian source and Balinese Illustrations* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

33. See Ludwig Sternbach, *Subhāṣita, Gnomic and Didactic Literature, A History of Indian Literature* series, ed. Jan Gonda (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), vol. 4, part 1.

34. Sternbach, *Subhāṣita, Gnomic and Didactic Literature,* 39–43.

35. Karl-Heinz Golzio, *Inscriptions of Champa Based on the Editions and Translations of Abel Bergaigne, Etienne Aymonier, Louis Finot, Edouard Huber and Other French Scholars and of the Work of R. C. Majumdar* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2004), 11, 148.

36. Timothy Lubin ("Legal Diglossia: Modeling Discursive Practices in Premodern Indic Law," in *Bilingual Discourse and Cross-Cultural Fertilization: Sanskrit and Tamil in Medieval India,* ed. Whitney Cox and Vinceno Vergiani [Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, Ecole française d'Extrême Orient, 2013], 411–455.) argues that this impact is visible not only in the use of the Sanskrit language, but also in the emergence of a Sanskritized, formal and formulaic form of the local vernacular languages and a rearticulation of indigenous legal traditions, tailored to local needs.

37. Jan Wisseman Christie, *Register of the Inscriptions of Java (from 732 to 1060 A.D.),* Part 1: To May 855 A.D., unpublished Consultation Draft 2 (2002), 17; 4–6; inscription no. 8.

38. Jan Wiseman Christie, *Register of the Inscriptions of Java (from 732 to 1060 A.D.),* Part 3: 898–929 A.D., unpublished Consultation Draft 2, 2002), 1; inscription no. 147.

39. J. G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia II: Selected Inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th Century A.D.* (Bandung: Masa Baru, 1956), 15–46.

40. Thomas R. Trautmann, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, in association with Ashoka University, 2015), chap. 7.

41. Ibid., 291–293.

42. Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History,* Encounters with Asia, ed. Victor H. Mair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 269–273.

43. Victor H. Mair and Tsu-Lin Mei, "The Sanskrit Origins of Recent Style Prosody," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51, no. 2 (1991): 375–470; Victor H. Mair, "Xie He's 'Six Laws' of Painting and Their Indian Parallels," in *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe,* ed. Zongqi Cai (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 81–122.

44. Victor H. Mair, trans., *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 46.

45. See, for instance, *Arthashastra* 12.5.16–20, 43–47; 13.4.9–11.

46. Mair, *The Art of War,* 43–45.

47. Apart from being the capital of the Tang dynasty between the seventh and early tenth centuries, Changan had over one hundred monasteries and was famous for its religious libraries and collections. See Wang Xiang, "From Nālandā to Chang'an: A Survey of Buddhist Libraries in Medieval China (618–907)," in *Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange,* ed. Tansen Sen (New Delhi, Singapore: Manohar and ISEAS, 2014), 208–231.

48. See Peter Skilling, "Buddhism and the Circulation of Ritual in Early Peninsular Southeast Asia," in *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange,* ed. Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 371–384.

49. Maritime Southeast Asia's centuries-long experience in seafaring may have influenced boat-making techniques farther afield. Musical instruments and musical ideas may also have traveled across the ocean. See V. Selvakumar, "Contacts between India and Southeast Asia in Ceramic and Boat Building Traditions," in ibid., 197–220; and Arsenio Nicolas, "Early Musical Exchange between India and Southeast Asia," in ibid., 347–370. According to P. C. Bagchi (*India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations,* 2nd ed. [Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1950]), Taoism influenced Indian Buddhist Sahajayana and Indian mysticism, and the custom of maintaining royal annals in Assam (in the Buranjis) came from China.

50. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men,* 237.

51. *Sriwijaya: History, Religion & Language of an early Malay Polity: Collected Studies by George Coedès and Louis-Charles Damais* (Kuala Lampur: Monograph of the Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society no. 20 1992), 26.

52. See Upinder Singh, "Politics, Piety, and Patronage: The Burmese Engagement with Bodhgayā," in Upinder Singh, *The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics and Archaeology* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2016), 394–431.

53. Alexander Soper, "Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China. II. Pseudo-Foreign Images," *Artibus Asiae* 16, nos. 1–2 (1953): 83–110.

54. Philippe Collombert, "Le conte de h'hirondelle et de la mer," in *Acts of the Seventh*

International Conference of Demotic Studies, Copenhagen, 23–27 Aug. 1999, ed. Kim Ryhold (Copenhagen: The Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, University of Copenhagen Museum Tuscalanum Press, 2002), 59–76.

55. Marilina Bètro, “Aśoka in un testo letterario demotico?,” *Studi Ellenistici* 12 (1999): 115–125 (*Studi Classici e Orientali,* ed. Biagio Virgilio [Pisa-Roma: Instituti Editoriali e Poligrfici Internazionale]).

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